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LOST FOR LOVE BY M. E. BRADDON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

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# LOST FOR LOVE:

A NOVEL.

BY

M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1874.

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TO  
MR. AND MRS. JOHN TAYLOR

THIS WORK IS INSCRIBED,

AS

AN EXPRESSION OF THE AUTHOR'S ESTEEM.





# LOST FOR LOVE.

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## CHAPTER I.

"Où, sans doute, tout meurt; ce monde est un grand rêve,  
Et le peu de bonheur qui nous vient en chemin,  
Nous n'avons pas plutôt ce roseau dans la main,  
Que le vent nous l'enlève."

DR. OLLIVANT sat alone in his library and consulting-room, a spacious chamber built out at the back of his house in Wimpole-street, after his day's work was ended—a long day and a heavy one; for at six-and-thirty years of age the doctor found himself possessed of a great practice—a practice that recompensed him largely for his devotion to science, but left little margin in his life for pleasure. It may indeed be doubted if Dr. Ollivant knew the meaning of that word "pleasure," except so far as it was accessible to him in dictionaries. His father had been a hard-working—the world added money-grubbing—country practitioner, and, at the earliest stage in which the infant brain is open to receive impressions, had striven to imbue his son's mind with a correct idea of life, contemplated always from his own particular point of view: that life was meant for hard work—that without hard work no man could expect to suc-

ceed—that worldly success was the supreme good to which the soul of man could aspire.

Cuthbert Ollivant learnt the lesson, but applied it after his own fashion. Had he possessed no higher brain than his father, he would most likely have restricted his notion of success—or, as his father called it, “getting on”—to the consolidation and improvement of his father’s practice, the steady-going old-fashioned family-surgeon business, in the sleepy old town of Long Sutton, Devonshire. But the lad happened to be endowed with a larger mind than had illumined the Ollivant family within the present century; and for him success meant originality—the fruition of new ideas, a step forward in the march of science; or, if not absolute invention, at least such an application of the wisdom of the past as should achieve some fresh good in the present.

For a youth with such yearnings, Long Sutton was not large enough. Samuel Ollivant well-nigh uprooted the scanty wisp of hair which encircled his bald crown when, after walking the hospitals and going through the usual curriculum, his son told him that he would return no more to the sleepy little Devonshire town, where his race had abided and thriven from generation to generation. His father might dispose of the good old family practice to whomsoever he would. He, Cuthbert, would remain in London—had indeed been already elected parish-doctor in a populous district by Bethnal-green. The pay was of the poorest, he wrote cheerfully, but the experience would be immense.

Mr. Ollivant groaned and gnashed his teeth, and told his wife that her son was an idiot; but nothing

he could say to the benighted young man could shake his purpose. Cuthbert began his work in the parlor of Bethnal-green at three-and-twenty years of age, and went on with it steadily till he was twenty-six; and, except at Christmas time, when he came to the home of his forefathers for a duty-visit, Long Sutton knew him no more. After three years' unflagging labour—there had never been such a parish-doctor within the memory of the oldest overseer—he went abroad, studied in France and Germany, pushed on to St. Petersburg, made himself familiar with every school of medicine, and was called back to England, a few months before his thirtieth birthday, to attend his father's deathbed.

"You've made a great mistake in life, Cuthbert," said the old man, during the one brief hour in which he was able to talk rationally with his son. "You might have made this a splendid practice, if you had worked with me for the last seven years; as it is, the business has fallen off. I've been getting old; didn't like to have a stranger about me, so wouldn't take a partner. Filby and Jackson have undermined me in the place, Cuthbert; the practice isn't what it was when you were a boy at school, by three hundred a year. But I leave you a comfortable little bit of money, in spite of everything. It's your mother's doing—there never was such a woman to save money."

The "comfortable little bit of money" thus spoken of amounted to some thousands, quite enough to justify Cuthbert Ollivant in the step he took immediately after his father's funeral. He sold the Long Sutton practice to Filby and Jackson, who already

had three-fourths of the town on their books, and by this purchase established a monopoly. He would have sold his father's household goods also, but here his mother interposed. The chairs and tables might be old-fashioned, cumbrous, inelegant; but they were the chairs and tables she had known all her married life.

"Two-and-thirty years, Cuthbert; think of that!"

"I do, mother, and for that very reason think we ought to begin our new life with new furniture."

"I am too old to begin a new life, dear, and I like the old things best." This with a tender glance at an ancient Spanish-mahogany sideboard that age had made almost as black as ebony. "They don't make such things now."

"I'm rather glad they don't," remarked her profane son. "It will cost more money to move the things than they are worth, I believe, mother; but if you like them, they shall be moved. I'd as soon sit upon one chair as another. I have no artistic tastes."

So the ancient sideboard, the secretaires, and bureaux, and four-post bedsteads of a bygone age—all pervaded by a certain grimness that stood for respectability—were conveyed from Long Sutton to the house which Cuthbert Ollivant had taken for himself in Wimpole-street, and being set up there, under Mrs. Ollivant's direction, made the London house almost as grim and dark and ancient-looking as the home of Cuthbert's infancy. Perhaps Wimpole-street itself is hardly the gayest or brightest of thoroughfares. Its length is to the stranger akin to despair, and it has been hardly dealt with as to width, whereby the shadow of over-the-way broods sullenly upon

the fronts of the houses that turn their backs to the afternoon sun. But Wimpole-street is eminently respectable, fashionable even, or at any rate appertaining to the West-end; and Dr. Ollivant—he had taken the higher degree in Paris, and made haste now to obtain it in London—had chosen Wimpole-street as a fair base for his operations. He had no more to do with Bethnal-green, but he gave two hours of every morning—from eight till ten—to gratis patients. For the first year of his Wimpole-street life they were almost his only patients. Then little by little his fame spread; he had taken to himself a specialty during his continental travels, namely, the treatment of heart-disease—had written a little book upon this theme, and published the same in London and Paris. By the aid of this book he advertised himself into the notice of a good many idle people who fancied they had heart-disease, and a few who were real sufferers. Rich old ladies and gentlemen, who lived alone and lived too well, came to him, liked his manner—a grave and somewhat cold reserve which was yet courteous, and implied profound wisdom—and made him their physician in ordinary. “Ollivant on Cardiac Diseases” and “Ollivant on Auscultation” became almost standard works. In a word, Cuthbert Ollivant had succeeded, and by the time five years had run off the lease of the house in Wimpole-street, had made for himself a position which he deemed the stepping-stone to future distinction.

His mother lived with him now, as she had lived with him from the beginning, the careful mistress of his house, the intelligent companion of his brief intervals of leisure. Her character presented a curious

mixture of the ultra-prosaic with the intellectual and imaginative. She would lay down her volume of Wordsworth or Shelley to order the dinner or give out a week's supply of grocery. She made her son's money go farther than perhaps any one else in the world could have made it go. She would not suffer a stale crust of bread or a basin of dripping to be wasted between January and December; yet she contrived to retain the respect of her servants, and was accounted a liberal mistress. Her son's simple dinners were ordered with a discretion and cooked with a nicety that could hardly have been exceeded at a West-end Club. Every detail of the table was perfection, though no modern elegance, no phantom-like glass or rich-hued majolica, adorned the board. The old-fashioned heavily-cut decanters, the ponderous plate, sparkled and shone upon the snowy linen; and, pleasantest of all, was the mother's face—a feminine likeness of the son's—with deep earnest eyes, white teeth, and mobile mouth.

It was half-past nine o'clock, a November night, a wet night in a wet autumn, the rain beating heavily on the skylight above the doctor's head. He had dined, and spent his after-dinner hour with his mother, talking literature and politics, for she made it her business to be interested and well informed in everything that interested her son, and had come down to his own room to read—to read the last scientific book worth reading.

An old-fashioned silver teapot, a breakfast cup and saucer, stood on a Chippendale table at his elbow. The doctor smiled to himself as he poured out the tea—a grave half-ironical smile.

"Old-bachelor ways already," he thought; "tea-drinking and midnight study. But, then, I never was a young man—in the common acceptance of the phrase."

A double knock at the hall-door caught his quick ear.

"A cabman's knock," he said, with a little discontented look, and a longing glance at his open book; "some dropper-in come for an evening's gossip—a nuisance, for I want to get at the bottom of this fellow's ideas."

"This fellow" was the author of the book—a formidable volume of five hundred pages or so, half of which were still uncut.

Dr. Ollivant was not famous for his social instincts; but, as he was apt to remark to his mother, "a man can't go through the world without some people insisting upon knowing him;" and a few people had been pertinacious enough to establish themselves on familiar terms with the doctor, in spite of himself—self-elected friends. They were for the most part of his own profession. He asked them to dinner two or three times in the year, and suffered them to drop in now and then of an evening, but gave no active encouragement to their visits.

A card was brought him by his servant—an elderly man, who had been his father's factotum, and had accompanied the furniture from Long Sutton. Dr. Ollivant looked at it listlessly, then brightened with a flash of surprise.

"Mark Chamney!" he exclaimed, in a half-dreamy tone, "Mark Chamney!" Then hurriedly to the servant, "Show the gentleman in here directly."



He began to poke the fire furiously—a man's favourite form of hospitality, and then went to the door to receive his visitor.

Mr. Chamney had been his school-friend more than twenty years ago, when he was a lad at a west-country public school—his bosom-friend in the days when he had some kind of belief in friendship.

The unexpected visitor came out of the dim light of the hall into the clear white light of the doctor's study. A tall man, of the type known as lanky, with long loose limbs and a cadaverous countenance, redeemed from absolute ugliness by honest blue eyes—eyes that were mild and tender as a woman's.

This was Mark Chamney, the doctor's senior by four years, and his protector in the days gone by. Chamney had been a dunce and an athlete. Cuthbert, a fragile youth of fourteen, had construed Homer and Virgil for his friend, whose prompt interference had shielded the younger boy from the school bullies.

Cuthbert—himself in no manner deficient in pluck—had worshipped Mark as the very incarnation of force and courage—his Achilles, his Hector, his Ajax; and they had parted at the close of Mark's last term, swearing to be friends for life, and had never seen each other from that day until this.

Dr. Ollivant felt a faint pang of remorse at sight of the altered face—the same, but O, how changed!—remembering how little he had ever done to perpetuate this boyish friendship. But was not the other equally to blame? The two men clasped hands.

"I should have known you anywhere," said Mark.

Dr. Ollivant could hardly echo the declaration.

He could only grasp his friend's hand a little harder, and say:

"You are about the only man in the world I should be glad to see to-night, Chamney."

"And I'm glad to hear you say as much, Ollivant, for I've come to claim the fulfilment of an old promise—a long-forgotten one, perhaps."

"No," said the other gravely, "not forgotten, if you mean our old vow of life-long friendship. I have gone through life without acquiring the knack of making many friends. I doubt if I have ever made one real one since the days when you used to take my part against the Goliaths of Hillersley Grammar-school."

This was said as heartily as it was in Cuthbert Ollivant to say anything—heartiness not being a characteristic of his manner.

"Odd, that we should never have knocked up against each other in all these years," continued the doctor after a brief interval of silence, during which Mr. Chamney had dropped into a chair, with a certain air of listlessness or fatigue, widely different from that muscular exuberance which Cuthbert remembered at Hillersley.

"Hardly so odd as it may appear at the first showing," answered Chamney. "Did you ever take any particular pains to look me up?"

"I don't believe I have had an idle day since I left Hillersley."

"That means No. Well, Ollivant, if you *had* looked for me, the result would have been pretty much the same; for I have spent the best part of the interval on a sheep-run in Queensland."

The doctor felt relieved of some portion of that

remorse which had seemed to weigh upon his spirit since Mark Chamney's entrance.

"What took you to Queensland?" he asked, ringing the bell for the man-of-all-work, who seemed to have an intuitive knowledge of what was wanted from him, as he came immediately, furnished with case bottles and a decanter of sherry on an old-fashioned silver tray—one of the heirlooms of the house of Ollivant. Even the case bottles were heirlooms, heavier and clumsier than modern bottles.

"What took me to Queensland?" repeated the visitor, extending his long legs upon the doctor's hearth, and folding his gaunt arms. He was clothed from head to foot in a light gray stuff, which made him look his biggest. "A speculative temper, and an aversion to any mode of earning my living which was open to me at home. I was not a genius like you, Cuthbert. I always hated head-work, and was plucked ignominiously in every examination at Hillersley, as I daresay you remember. But I wasn't bad at figures, as long as I didn't see 'em upon paper. I heard of men doing wonders out yonder in the sheep-line; so, when my father—a prosperous solicitor at Exeter—proposed making me his articled clerk, I saved myself the trouble of disputing the point, by running away. I needn't bore you with the details of my flight. I left Exeter with a few pounds in my pocket, and worked my way out to Australia, before the mast. I had rather a hard time of it for the first year or so, and made a nearer acquaintance with starvation than I cared about. But before the second year was over, I was manager for a man who had been lucky enough to get hold of one of the finest stations on the Darling

Downs, extending upwards of ten miles in every direction. He held a squatter's lease from the government at a mere nominal rent, and on muster days I have stood at the gate and helped to count seventy thousand sheep as they went through. My employer made sixty thousand pounds in less than ten years, but contrived to drink himself to death in the same time. He had made me his partner a few years before he died—delirium tremens and business habits not being compatible—a fact of which he was sufficiently conscious to know that he couldn't get on without me. At the time he died sheep happened to be rather low; I had saved enough money, with assistance from the Australian banks, to buy his share of the station; and so began life afresh at thirty years of age, worth twenty thousand pounds after all debts were paid—went on from this pretty comfortably, taking the bad with the good, and kept hard at it for fifteen years more, when I took it into my head I ought to come back to England and see my daughter."

"Your daughter!" exclaimed Dr. Ollivant. "Then you had married?"—as if it were the most unnatural thing a man could do.

"Yes," answered the other with a profound sigh, "I married the dearest girl in the world. She had come out to Hobart Town as a governess; a solitary young creature, with hardly a friend in the world; and I met her there in one of my summer holiday trips, and loved her from the hour I first saw her. I suppose the kind of life I led upon the farm—standing up to my waist in water to see the sheep-washing, and galloping thirty miles before breakfast after strays—was calculated to make a man susceptible to that kind of influence.

Anyhow, I fell over head and ears in love with Mary Grover, and wasn't easy in my mind till I'd asked her to be my wife. She hung back at first, but I only loved her the better for her shyness; and when I pressed her hard, she told me in her own pretty words, which were very different from mine, that she didn't want to marry me, because she didn't think she was good enough; her family were a bad lot; her grandfather had been a gentleman, but his descendants had come down somehow; in short, she gave me to understand they were a set of out-and-out scamps, and that she had come to the Antipodes to get out of their way. This did not move me one jot, and I told her so. I wanted to marry her—not her family; and little by little I won her round. She owned that she didn't dislike me; that she liked me a little, because I was strong and brave, she said—dear soul, as if she could know anything about that!—and finally, that she would rather lead a solitary life with me up on the Downs than teach children French verbs and major scales in Hobart Town. After that I wasn't going to waste any more time; so we were married three weeks later, and I took my sweet young wife back to the farm. I had a good wooden house on the station, with a ten-foot verandah all round it, which had been built by Jack Ferguson, my late partner, and I thought it would do for us. But God only knows how it was—whether it was the climate or the lonely life that didn't suit her—my darling drooped and died only two years after our marriage, and just one year after she had given me a little daughter.”

“You should have brought her home,” said the doctor.

"The very thing I wished to do; but she wouldn't have it. She was unhappy even if I spoke of such a thing; she had some insuperable objection to returning to England, and I couldn't bear to vex her, and I didn't know the end was so near. She slipped away from me unawares—like a flower that you've transplanted overnight and find dead in the morning."

He got up and began to walk up and down the room, deeply moved by this agitating remembrance. Cuthbert watched him curiously. Then a wife was a thing that a man might really care for—not a hollow conventionality.

"I am very sorry for you, Mark," he said in a friendly tone, still wondering how so big a man could be so distressed by the loss of a woman. "But you have your daughter left, she must be a comfort to you." This was a mere mechanical attempt at consolation, Dr. Ollivant not having the faintest idea in what manner a daughter could be a comfort to any man.

"She's the only joy of my life," answered the other, with a rough energy which contrasted strangely with the doctor's grave tones—musical despite their gravity; for Dr. Ollivant's noble baritone voice was one of his richest gifts.

"And yet you could bring yourself to part with her?" said the doctor, with vague wonder. The whole business was out of his line—part and parcel of that world of the affections whereof he knew nothing, except so much as he had heard of it from his mother's favourite Wordsworth.

"Could I see her droop and die like her mother? That *might* have been climate, though strong men.

thrive yonder. I could run no such risk with Flora—a pretty name, isn't it? her mother's choice; so I sent her home with a shepherd's wife, when she was two years old. The woman took her straight to my people at Exeter; but before she was seven, my mother died, and my father sent Flora to a boarding-school near London. He died soon after, and there was the little thing friendless, and with strangers. She seemed happy, however, at least her letters told me so—dear little childish letters!—and she remained in the same care until I came home a year ago and took a house in London, and settled down with my little girl—she was seventeen last April—for the rest of my life.” This with a faint sigh.

“And you have lived in London a year without trying to find me out until to-night?” said the doctor, with an injured air.

“You lived twenty years without making any attempt to find me,” replied his friend. “Shall I tell you what brought me to you to-night, Cuthbert? It's hardly flattering to the ghost of our boyish friendship—if there's even as much as a ghost left of that!—but I daresay you've found out before now that human nature is selfish. It was a book you've written that induced me to come to you.”

“A book of mine! I never wrote anything but medical pamphlets.”

“Precisely. What's the name of your book? *On Cardiac Diseases*. That's it, I think. Ever so long before I left Queensland I had reason to suspect there was something not quite right here,”—touching his broad chest,—“the gentlest hill winded me. I had palpitation sometimes, at other times a dull heavy

feeling, as if my heart didn't move at all; sleepless nights, languor, a dozen disagreeable symptoms. Finding I couldn't walk as I used to walk, I took it out of myself in hard riding; but this didn't mend matters. I began to think that I was nervous or fanciful, and fought hard against my own sensations."

"You consulted no medical man?"

"The faculty doesn't abound among our sheep-walks. Besides, I shouldn't have liked to have myself overhauled by a stranger. I thought the voyage home would do me good, and it did. But the home life and this murky atmosphere have played the deuce with me; and, in a few words, I've a notion that I've come pretty near the end of my tether."

"You've had no doctor in England?"

"No. I suppose the life I led over the water makes a man something of a savage. I've a rooted antipathy to strangers. But as I was reading the *Times* the other day your name caught my eye at the top of a column. Ollivant is not a common name. I remembered that your father was a doctor, and I thought I might as well come and see if the Dr. Ollivant of Wimpole-street was the little fellow I used to save from a licking now and then at Hillersley."

"My dear old friend," said the doctor, stretching out his hand to his old schoolfellow with a warmth that was not common to him, "God grant that the instinct which brought you to me may be an instinct designed to accomplish your cure! The fancied heart-disease is, I daresay, only an effect of the natural depression of mind which your bereavement and your lonely life in Australia were calculated to engender. Change of air, change of scene, new pursuits—"



"Have done nothing for me," answered the other, with conviction.

Dr. Ollivant looked at his friend for the first time with the searching gaze of the physician. To the keen professional eye that haggard visage, lantern jaws, and faded eyes betokened a shattered constitution, if not organic disease.

"Come to me to-morrow morning," he said, in his soothing professional tone, "and I will make a careful examination. I daresay I shall find things a great deal better than you suppose."

"To-night is as good as to-morrow morning," answered Mr. Chamney, as coolly as if it were a mere business question that he wanted settled. "Why not to-night?"

"To-night, if you prefer it. Only I thought you might like to devote this evening to a little friendly talk about old times, and that you'd come up-stairs to the drawing-room and let me present you to my mother."

"I shall be very glad to know your mother, and to talk about old times. But I'd rather have that other question settled first."

"So be it then. Just take off your coat and waist-coat, like a good fellow. I'll lock the door, to make sure against interruption."

The doctor took a stethoscope out of a little drawer near at hand, and began his examination with that quiet professional air which has a certain soothing influence, the air of a man who only requires to ascertain what is wrong in the human machine in order to set it right straightway. His face grew graver as he sounded and listened, graver and more grave

as the examination proceeded, till at the end of about ten minutes, which seemed longer to the patient, he lifted his head from Mark Chamney's broad chest with a faint sigh, and put down the stethoscope.

"You find I was right," said Mr. Chamney, without a break in his voice.

"I fear so."

"Come, why put it doubtfully like that? You know so."

"There is disease, I admit," answered the other cautiously; "I should do wrong to deny that. But that kind of disease is not always fatal. With care a man may live to a good old age, in spite of organic derangement as bad, perhaps worse, than yours. I have known a man so affected live to eighty, and die at last of bronchitis. You must take care of yourself, Chamney, that's all you have to do."

And then the doctor proceeded to describe the necessary regimen, a regimen chiefly of deprivation. The patient was to avoid this, not to do the other, and so on; no violent exercise, no excitement, no late hours.

"It's a poor dead-and-alive kind of existence," said Mr. Chamney, when the doctor had finished; "and I thought when I came home I should be able to enjoy myself a little; follow the hounds, charter a yacht, and take my little girl about the world—see life, in short. But this puts an end to all those notions. If it were not for Flora's sake I think I'd sooner chance it, and get as much as I can out of life while it lasts. But I haven't a friend in the world that I can count upon for my darling when I'm gone."

"You may count upon me," said Dr. Ollivant, "and upon my mother into the bargain."

"Do you know I had some idea of that when I came to you to-night, Cuthbert? If he's my Ollivant, and as good a fellow as he promised to be, he might be a friend for my little girl when I'm gone, I said to myself. And your mother is still living, is she? That's comfortable."

"Yes, and likely to live for many years, thank God," answered the doctor. "You must bring your daughter here to-morrow, Mark. I'm a busy man, as you may suppose; but my mother has ample leisure for friendship."

"I'll bring her. By the bye, there was one thing you did not tell me just now; but it hardly needed telling. With disease of that kind a man would be liable to die at any moment, wouldn't he?"

"Why—yes—in such cases there is always the possibility of sudden death."

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## CHAPTER II.

"Eyes of some men travel far  
For the finding of a star;  
Up and down the heavens they go,  
Men that keep a mighty rout!  
I'm as great as they, I trow,  
Since the day I found thee out,  
Little Flower!"

MR. CHAMNEY brought his daughter to see Mrs. Ollivant next day, at an hour when the doctor was absent on his daily rounds; but the lady had been fully prepared for the visit, and received her son's friend, and her son's friend's only child, as it were with open arms. She was full of talk about her visitors when Cuthbert came in to dinner at seven o'clock.

"They stayed to luncheon, and were with me more than two hours. I never saw a sweeter girl than Miss Chamney, or Flora, as both she and her father insisted I should call her."

"Pretty?" asked the doctor rather listlessly, with a man's usual question.

"I hardly know whether you would call her absolutely pretty. Her features would not bear being measured by line and rule; but there is a sweetness, a freshness, a youthful innocence about her that are more winning than beauty. To my mind she is the very incarnation of Wordsworth's Lucy."

Dr. Ollivant shrugged his shoulders.

"I never had an exalted opinion of Wordsworth's Lucy," he said; "a girl who was very well beside the banks of Dove, but would not have been noticeable elsewhere. I like beauty to be brilliant, flashing, something that inspires admiration and awe, like a tropical thunderstorm."

"Then you will not admire Miss Chamney. But she is a fascinating little thing, for all that."

"Little!" exclaimed the doctor contemptuously, "a mere stump of a woman, I suppose, like a lead-pencil cut down."

"No, she is rather tall than otherwise, but very slim. The most girlish figure—"

"All angles," muttered the doctor.

"And with a languid kind of grace, like a flower with a slender stem—a narcissus, for instance."

"Wants tone, I daresay," said the doctor. "Well, mother, I can't say that your description inspires me with any ardent desire to make the young lady's acquaintance. However, if you are satisfied that is the grand point; for you will be a much more valuable friend to her than ever I can be. And she will have need of friends when poor Chamney is gone."

"He looks very ill, Cuthbert. Do you think him in actual danger?"

"I give him a twelvemonth," answered the doctor.

"Poor fellow! And the poor girl; it is so much worse for her. She seems so fond of him. I never saw such affection between father and daughter."

"Indeed!" said the doctor, eating his dinner with his usual calmness. He was not by any means heart-broken because the friend of his boyhood had come

back to him with the seal of death upon his herculean frame. He was sorry with a temperate sorrow, thought the situation of father and daughter touching, but was accustomed to the tranquil contemplation of touching scenes. And he was prepared to befriend the orphan to the best of his power when her day of bereavement should come, to defend her as her father had defended him when he was a little lonely lad at Hillersley-Grammar-school.

He waited for his first leisure day to go and call upon his friend, half in friendship, half professionally; but he meant to take neither fee nor reward from his old schoolfellow. Mr. Chamney had hired for himself a large house in Fitzroy-square, hardly conscious that it was not at the fashionable end of London. It was a broad airy place, and one square seemed to Mark very much like another. It could matter very little to the resident, when his curtains were drawn and his lamps lighted, whether the square were called Fitzroy or Belgrave.

The house had been built on a grander scale than most of the surrounding mansions; the hall was spacious, paved with black and white marble, the staircase wide, the rooms large and lofty. Black marble pillars sustained the dining-room ceiling, the mantelpieces were elaborately carved. It was a house which, with appropriate furniture, might have been made very handsome; but Mr. Chamney had furnished it sparsely with the mere necessities of existence, as if it had been a lodge in the wilderness. And he had bought his goods and chattels secondhand, selecting them haphazard at various brokers' shops, as he roamed the lighted streets after nightfall; now a huge side-

board, now a table, now a dozen or so of chairs, or a set of dark, gloomy-looking window-hangings.

To his daughter, who came direct from the bare benches and deal tables of a boarding-school, the house and its appointments appeared splendid; and then the glory of having a house of her own! She told her father that there was something wanting in the drawing-room—it had an empty look compared with Miss Mayduke's drawing-room at Notting-hill. But that sacred chamber was beautified and adorned with the water-coloured landscapes, Berlin-wool chair-covers, wax-fruit and decalcomanie of Miss Mayduke's young ladies, and had only achieved its present perfection in the progress of years. No drawing-room could burst Minerva-like into existence from the brain of an upholsterer.

"I must work you some chair-covers, papa," said Flora, and immediately bought several pounds of Berlin wool and a dozen yards of canvas. The chair-covers progressed at the rate of a hundred stitches or so per day, and in the mean time the Fitzroy-square drawing-room presented a desert waste of second-hand Turkey carpet, broken by distant islets in the shape of chairs and tables, all alike old-fashioned and irrelevant; a ponderous mahogany loo-table, four ancient ebony chairs with carved backs, six rosewood ditto inlaid with brass, a modern sofa or two, an office-table in the back drawing-room, in which apartment Mr. Chamney wrote his letters and read his newspaper. One spot of brightness redeemed the barren waste; in the centre window of the front drawing-room Miss Chamney had established an aviary,—half a dozen canaries in a big cage, and an Australian parrot in a

circular temple of polished brass, dependent from the ceiling. The canaries did not sing much. It seemed as if the atmosphere of Fitzroy-square were not conducive to melody, for the birds had been warranted vocal when Miss Chamney bought them. But they fluttered and chirped in a cheerful manner, and sometimes even essayed a feeble warbling. The Australian stranger made a noise like the creaking of a door, which it repeated at intervals throughout the day, to its own evident satisfaction, as if it found therein an adequate expression of its feelings. The noise was hideous, but the bird was handsome, and that, Miss Chamney said, made amends; one could not expect everything from a bird.

She was standing by the big cage administering to the canaries when Cuthbert Ollivant first saw her. Her father was out when he called, so he had asked to see the young lady herself, unwilling to waste his drive to the regions of Fitzroy—quite out of his beat, which lay Mayfair way, among narrow streets of small houses, where the fanciful old maiden ladies and the obese old bachelors over-ate and over-drunk themselves. He had come up-stairs repeating the poet's lines about the maiden by the banks of Dove, smiling to himself at his mother's sentimentality, being himself in no way given to sentiment. The maid-servant opened the drawing-room door for him, and he went in unannounced, and saw her, Flora Chamney, for the first time, bending down to minister to a languishing canary.

“My mother was right after all,” he said to himself, making up his mind, after his manner, at the first glance. “She is the sweetest girl I ever saw in my life.”



"Sweet" was an adjective which people applied involuntarily to Flora Chamney. A small oval face, with large gray eyes, dark lashes, dark brows finely pencilled, darkest brown hair which rippled naturally upon the ivory forehead, a long slender throat, a figure slim almost to a fault, perfect hands and feet—in short, a delicately-finished picture rather than a striking one. A gray merino gown, a narrow linen collar, a blue ribbon tied loosely round the throat, were all the aid the picture took from dress; but there was a grace and sweetness about the whole which reminded Cuthbert Ollivant of a Greuse he had once seen sold at Christie and Manson's for eleven hundred pounds sterling—a kit-cat figure of a girl caressing a dove.

He found no difficulty in introducing himself. Flora gave him her hand with a frank smile.

"You can be only one person in the world," she said; "for we have no other friends. You must be Dr. Ollivant."

"Yes, I am Dr. Ollivant. I am very glad you have learned to think of me as a friend."

"You wouldn't wonder at that if you heard papa talk of you. He is never tired of telling me what a good little fellow you were at Hillersley Grammar-school; and such a prodigy of learning! If he had not said so much of your affection for him, I should have been rather inclined to feel afraid of you."

"Afraid of me! But why?" he asked, looking at her with a half-wondering admiration, and thinking that if he had married early in life, he too might have had a daughter like this. But then all daughters were not like this.

"Because you are so clever. At Miss Mayduke's".

—taking it for granted that he must know all about Miss Mayduke—"I was always afraid of Miss Kilso, who spent her whole existence at the top of the class, and knew the precise date of every event that has ever happened since the Flood, and could do the differential what's-its-name, and hyperboluses and things, and took the first prize every half!"

"Then you don't like clever people?" said the doctor, smiling gently at the hyperboluses.

"I like them very much, when they are nice."

"Musical, for instance, or artistic?" he suggested, with a consciousness that he was neither of those things.

"Musical people are darlings; and I like artists. There are plenty in this neighbourhood, but we don't know them. There is a young man who lives three doors off, who ought to be as clever as Raffaele; at least, he has hair of the same colour as Raffaele's, and a Grecian nose."

"Science, I conclude, is less interesting to you?"

Miss Chamney made a wry face, as at the idea of something nasty.

"That means steam-engines and cotton-looms and things, doesn't it?" she asked, in her winning childish way, which made even her foolish speeches pleasant to hear.

"It means a good deal more than steam-engines sometimes. But one can hardly expect a young lady to be interested in it, any more than one can expect the flowers to know their own Latin names, or be learned in botany. You are fond of birds, I see."

"I try to make companions of them," she answered, "when papa is out. But I find it rather uphill work."

They put their heads on one side and chirp when I talk to them, but we don't get beyond that. I really think the parrot has the most intellect, though his note is not musical."

The Australian, which had creaked intermittently throughout the conversation, creaked his loudest at this, as if in approval.

"I have given them the names of my favourite heroes," said Flora, looking at her canaries, "but I am afraid they are not very sure of their identity. That little fat one with the topknot is the Vicar of Wakefield; the one with a black wing is Hamlet; that little perky bird is David Copperfield; that bright yellow one is the Prince who found the Sleeping Beauty in the wood. I don't think he had any name in the story, had he?" she asked, appealing to the doctor, as if his recollections of nursery lore were of the freshest, "so I have called him Prince Lovely. The others are all fairy-tale princes."

"And have you no one besides your birds when your father is away?"

"No one. Papa's old friends—people he knew when he was a boy, that is to say—are all Devonshire people, and he says he doesn't care about hunting them up, not having been particularly fond of them in his boyhood. There are my old schoolfellows; and papa told me if I wanted any companions I could have them. But when I went to see Miss Mayduke six months ago, all my favourites had left, and I hadn't the courage to go to their own homes in search of them. I should have had to see their papas and mammas, and—I daresay it's very foolish, but I have such a horror of strangers."

"Yet you hardly seemed to be horrified by me when I came in just now unannounced."

"O, that's quite different; papa has talked so much about you, and your mother was so kind to me the other day, you seem like an old friend."

"I hope I may never seem any less."

"And it is such a comfort to me to think that you are a doctor, and can take care of papa's health. He has not been very well lately. But you will keep him well, won't you?"

"I will do all that science can do to keep him well," answered the doctor gravely.

"Can science do that? Then I shall love science with all my heart. How stupid of me to forget just now that medicine is a science! And I have always thought medicine one of the grandest things in the world."

"Really?"

"What can be grander than the art of saving people's lives?—I reverence a great physician."

The doctor was curiously touched by this avowal—sweet flattery from those childish lips.

"It would have been worth my while to undergo all the pains and penalties of marriage if I could have had such a daughter," he thought.

The short winter's day—one of the first days in December—was closing. The fire had burned low, neglected by Flora in her devotion to the canaries; the lamplight from below flashed here and there upon the bare walls; the room looked big and dark and empty—a gloomy home for so fair a creature.

"I should have made her surroundings ever so

much brighter if she had been my daughter," thought the doctor.

"You must find life rather dreary in this big house, when your father is away?" he said.

"No," she answered, with a smile that brightened all her face in the twilight; "I have never known what it is to be dull. First and foremost, I am so happy in the thought that papa has come back to me for ever."

"Unstable happiness," thought the doctor. "Brief for ever."

"And then, even when papa is out—though I am always sorry to lose him even for so short a time—I am able to amuse myself. I have a piano in my room up-stairs, and my paint-box."

"You paint, then?" asked the doctor, himself the most unaccomplished of men, and wondering how many accomplishments might go to the sum total of an educated young woman.

"I spoil a good deal of paper; but it's so nice being near Rathbone-place; one can always get more, and moist colours in little tubes that squirt out. It's enchantment to work with them."

"I should like to see some of your paintings."

"I shall be very pleased to show you the first I finish," answered Flora doubtfully; "but they don't very often come to that. They look beautiful at first, and I feel I really am getting on; and then somehow they go wrong, and after they've once taken the turn, the harder I work at them the worse they go."

"Landscapes or figures?"

"O, either. I've been doing the human figure lately—a nymph at a fountain—in chalks; but chalks

are so dirty, and the human figure is rather uninteresting without clothes. Hark! that's papa's knock."

It was; and Mark Chamney came striding up the stairs presently, and burst into the drawing-room, out of breath, but looking big enough and strong enough to defy the destroyer Death. But it was only the large outline left of the once herculean form; the clothes hung loose upon the shrunken figure.

"That's right," he said, pleased at finding those two together. "Then you two have contrived to make friends without me?"

"We were friends already," answered Flora; "for I knew how you liked Dr. Ollivant."

"You'll stop to dinner, of course?" said Mark; "and Flora shall sing to us while we drink our wine."

The doctor hesitated. He was a reading man, and his quiet evenings were very precious to him. His mother would wait dinner for him. No, that might be avoided, for his brougham was below, and he could send the man home with a message. But she would be not the less disappointed; he so rarely dined away from her. Duty and reason cried "Dine in Wimpole-street," but the voice of inclination drowned them, and he stayed where he was.

"I never take wine after dinner," he said; "but I'll stay to hear Miss Chamney sing."

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## CHAPTER III.

"It seems to me that the coming of love is like the coming of spring—the date is not to be reckoned by the calendar. It may be slow and gradual; it may be quick and sudden. But in the morning, when we wake and recognise a change in the world without, verdure on the trees, blossoms on the sward, warmth in the sunshine, music in the air, then we say Spring has come!"

THE young man whom Miss Chamney had observed from her window occasionally—her neighbour at the distance of three doors—was an art-student—not a student of the plodding, drudging order; for the young man had the misfortune to be rich, and it mattered very little to him, from a prudential point of view, whether he was industrious or idle. But as he had a passion for art in the abstract, and an ambitious desire to win a name in the list of modern painters, he worked, or seemed to work, furiously. He was, however, somewhat spasmodic in the manner of his toil, and, like Flora, was apt to find the finish of a picture harder work than the beginning. Like Miss Chamney, he discovered human anatomy taken by itself, without the adventitious charm of raiment, to be a dryasdust business; that the human skeleton with its various bones is not altogether satisfying to the imagination; that the prolonged study of limbs unconnected with bodies, however various in the development of their muscles, is apt to pall upon the ardent spirit.

"I suppose Rubens did this kind of thing," said

this Mr. Leyburne, after a hard day's work in a private life school, not very far from Fitzroy-square. "He could never have done that foreshortening of the dead Christ in the Antwerp Museum if he hadn't gone in his hardest for anatomy. But, O, how I wish I were through it all, and at work upon my first historical picture! It does seem such bosh, sometimes, these everlasting fists and elbows and knee-joints. It isn't as if I meant to make my reputation in half-naked Greeks and Romans, Jason and the Golden Fleece, Theseus and Ariadne, Horatius what's-his-name, and that kind of stuff. If ever I grope my way farther back into the mist of ages than the Spanish Armada, may I be convicted of half a column of anachronisms by the *Times* critic. No, Mary Stuart and Bothwell, the murder of the Regent Moray, from a window in Linlithgow,—that's the kind of thing for my money."

Thus spoke Walter Leyburne, half in soliloquy, half in confidence, to his fellow-students, as he shut his day's work in his portfolio, and prepared to take his homeward way. A bright-looking young fellow, nay, handsome, and with an expression that was radiant as a summer morning; blue eyes; straight Greek nose; light auburn moustache, with drooping ends, sedulously trained, only half concealing a somewhat feminine mouth; auburn hair, worn long in the Raffaele fashion, artistic suit of black velvet, boots which would not have disgraced a club in Pall Mall, long supple white hands without gloves, a sprig of stephanotis in his buttonhole, a black-velvet Glen-garry in place of the regulation chimney-pot,—a curious admixture of Bohemianism and foppery in his costume.



This was the gentleman whom Flora had occasion to remark once or twice a day from her window. She might have seen him half-a-dozen times a day had she kept watch for him, his erratic habits causing him to tramp backwards and forwards between his lodgings and the outer world a good deal more often than was necessary to his artistic pursuits. He had chums and companions in arts scattered about the neighbourhood, and when seized by an original idea, would fling on his Scotch bonnet and rush forth to impart his inspiration to the ear of sympathy. He had appointments for friendly oyster-luncheons, or bitter-beer and sandwiches at a tavern in Rathbone-place, or he wanted something in the artist's-colour way in that district. Thus he was always flitting to and fro, on some pretence or other. He went every night to a theatre or some other place of amusement, to hear the "Chough and Crow" and eat welsh-rare-bits at Evans's, to play billiards at a public table; and he came home after midnight in a hansom cab, whose doors he flung asunder with a shameless bang. Flora's bower was in the front of the house, so she was wont to hear these post-midnight returns, and this young man's cheery voice chaffing the cabmen. He appeared to pay these functionaries with a lavish generosity, for there were never any complainings or remonstrances, only an interchange of witticisms and friendly good-nights.

It must be a wild, wicked kind of life, thought Flora; and yet the art-student seemed rather an amiable young man. Was there no one—no near relation—father, mother, uncle, aunt, or sister to check this headlong career, no restraining influence to snatch

such a good-looking young man from perdition? Flora was really sorry for him.

She was overwhelmed with astonishment when her father came home from the City—he paid occasional visits to that mysterious region—and rubbed his great hands cheerily, exclaiming:

“Flora, I have made an acquaintance. Our circle is widening. If we go on in this way I must get you a brougham to take you out when you pay visits. Only, unfortunately, this is a young man with nobody belonging to him, so far as I can make out.”

“A young man, papa!” said Flora. “Who can that be? A younger brother of Dr. Ollivant’s?”

“Ollivant never had such a thing as a brother. You must try a little nearer home, Flo. What should you say to that young man in the black-velvet jacket—the young man you’ve teased me about so often—making me get out of my easy-chair with ‘Be quick, pa, he’s just turning the corner; *do* look’?”

“Why, papa, you don’t mean that you could go up to him in the street and ask him to be friends with you?” cried Flora, blushing to the roots of her hair at the mere thought of such an outrage of the proprieties, as taught without extra charge by Miss Mayduke, of Notting-hill.

“Not exactly. But what do you think of that young man being intimately connected—indirectly—with my past life?”

Flora shook her head resolutely.

“It couldn’t be, papa. It would be too ridiculous.”

“I don’t see that. Why ridiculous? Because he wears a black-velvet coat, or because you’ve noticed him from your window?”

"But what do you mean, and what can he have to do with your past life? It isn't as if you were a painter."

"His uncle wasn't a painter, Flo; but he was my employer, and afterwards my partner in Queensland. He married early in life, but had neither chick nor child, as you've heard me say."

Flora nodded. She had heard her father relate his Australian adventures very often indeed, but was never tired of hearing them.

"And when he died all his money went to his only sister's only son. He left it to the sister, and her heirs, executors, and assigns, not knowing that she was dead and gone when he made his will. He had never taken the trouble to send her a ten-pound note, or to inquire if she wanted one, and died leaving her sixty thousand pounds."

"But what has all that to do with the young painter who lives three doors off?" asked Flora, puzzled.

"Only that he is the nephew who inherited the sixty thousand pounds."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Flora with a disappointed air; "and I thought he was a struggling artist who would have to commit suicide by and by if he couldn't sell his pictures. That accounts for his conduct to the cabmen."

"What conduct? What cabmen?"

Flora explained.

"And do you mean to say you have made his acquaintance, papa?" she asked afterwards.

"By the merest accident. When I came home I put a little money—only a few odd thousands—into

shipping, as you know—never had a secret from you, my darling. I went down to John Maravilla's office—he's the agent, you know—this morning to make an inquiry or two, and who should I see but our friend in the velvet jacket—he had dressed himself more like a Christian to come into the City, but I knew him by his long hair—lounging across Maravilla's desk asking questions about ships and shipping. Maravilla, who was rattling on in his usual way chuckling as if he had made half a million of money since breakfast, introduced us. "You ought to know Mr. Leyburne," he said; "he has a sixteenth in the Sir Galahad." "I ought to know the name of Leyburne," said I, "ships or no ships. Had you ever anybody belonging to you called Ferguson?" "I'm happy to say I had," answered the young man with the long hair; "for if I hadn't, I should never have had a share in Sir Galahad. My uncle, John Ferguson, left me all his money." "He was my first and only employer, and best friend," said I; and we were on the most intimate terms in less than five minutes; and he's going to dine with us this evening."

"Papa!" cried Flora, with a little joyous burst.

"What, you're pleased, are you, missy?" said the father thoughtfully.

"I doat upon painters, papa, and he looks cleverer than the others who live about here."

"He has the interest of sixty thousand pounds to pay for his fine clothes, my dear, unless he has contrived to fritter away any of the principal. Yes, he's coming at seven o'clock this evening. I thought we ought to be civil to him for the sake of his poor old

uncle, who was a good friend to me in spite of the brandy-bottle."

"Of course, papa, it's the least we can do to be kind to him, and perhaps he'll help me a little with my painting. I'm copying a study called 'Gulnare,' with long plaits and the dearest little Greek cap, but the flesh tints will come so very purple in the shadows, as if poor Gulnare had been taking nitrate of silver. Perhaps Mr. Leyburne—rather a pretty name, isn't it?—could tell me how to improve my flesh tints."

"Perhaps," said her father absently. "Strange, isn't it, missy, that I should come across this young fellow? When I hunted up Cuthbert Ollivant, I thought he was the only friend I had or was ever likely to have in the world, and now this young man seems as if he were a kind of nephew of mine."

"Of course he must be, since he is Mr. Ferguson's nephew, and Mr. Ferguson made your fortune. But, O, papa," cried Flora, shaking her head solemnly, "I'm afraid he's rather a wicked young man."

"How do you mean wicked, Baby?"

This was a favourite pet name for Flora. As he had called her Baby and thought of her as Baby in the far-away Australian days, so it best pleased Mark Chamney to call her Baby now.

"Wild, papa—dreadfully dissipated. He comes home late every night, in hansom cabs, and it's ever so much wickeder to ride in a hansom than a four-wheeler, papa, isn't it? Mrs. Gage told me so. 'Hansom cabs and wildness go together, Miss Flora,' she said."

Mrs. Gage was a mysterious female—elderly, lachry-

mose, and had seen better days—whom Mr. Chamney had picked up for his housekeeper.

"Never mind Mrs. Gage. I hope there's no harm in that young fellow, in spite of his late hours. I should be sorry to think it, for there's something frank and pleasant in his manner, and I shouldn't have asked him here if I thought he was dissipated."

"Perhaps twelve o'clock or a quarter past isn't so *very* late, papa?" said Flora thoughtfully.

"You're very exact, Baby."

"I can't help hearing him, papa—just under my window, as it were."

Flora was in quite a flutter of excitement all the afternoon. They had positively no friends except Dr. and Mrs. Ollivant. It was quite a wonder for them to expect any one to dinner. She made her father take her to Covent Garden to buy fruit for dessert, and chose bananas and pomegranates and prickly pears, and divers other recondite productions of nature, all of which belied their good looks and were flavourless to the palate. But it was her childish fancy to adorn the table with something uncommon—picturesque, even—which might charm the painter's eye by its novel form and colour. Mrs. Gage had been bidden to prepare a good dinner, but as that worthy woman's mind never soared above oxtail soup and cod's head and shoulders, roast beef and boiled fowls, there was no such thing as originality to be hoped for from her.

"I don't suppose he cares very much what he eats," thought Flora, who had fixed ideas upon the subject of this young man. "He looks superior to that. But, O, I hope he won't drink a great deal and get horribly tipsy, so that papa will never ask him again."

This idea was dreadful. But what can one expect from a young man who comes home late in a hansom?

There was an interval between the return from Covent Garden, laden with those curious products of the tropics, and seven o'clock. Flora devoted this time to arranging and rearranging her drawings, undecided which she should venture to show Mr. Leyburne. She must show him one of them, or how could she hope for any enlightening counsel upon the subject of flesh tints? But seen in the light of her new timidity, they all appeared too bad to exhibit. Juliet's mouth was out of drawing; Gulnare's left eye had a decidedly intoxicated look; an old man with a white beard—a study of "Benevolence"—was more purple by candlelight than she could have supposed possible. A group of camellias had been obviously copied from originals—cut out of turnips; a vase of fuchsia was painfully suggestive of pickled cabbage. Flora shut her portfolio in despair.

"I'd better show him all of them, and then he'll know what a miserable dauber I am," she said to herself. "How I wish he were poor, so that it would be a charity to take lessons of him!" And then she ran into the next room to dress; shook down the wealth of her dark rippling hair, and rolled it up again in the most bewitching manner imaginable—one broad massive plait twisted round the small head like a diadem; and put on a blue-silk dress—the dress her father had praised so often—rich lace encircling the graceful throat, loose sleeves half revealing the soft round arms. She had unlimited money to spend upon finery, and indulged her girlish fancy with all manner of pretti-

nesses, locketts, ribbons, and laces—all the things she had longed for in her school-days.

The dingy maroon curtains were drawn and big fires burning in the two drawing-rooms, whereby those apartments had almost a cheerful look despite their bareness. Mark Chamney was seated in his favourite arm-chair, hard as a brick-bat but capacious, with his legs extended across the hearth-rug in his accustomed attitude, reading the evening paper.

"Can't think what the deuce men find to amuse them in the papers," he said.

"That's what you always say, papa; yet you never read anything else."

"I can't say I care about books, Baby. I like to know that what I'm reading is the last thing I could read. What's the good of history, for instance? this week falsifies last week. I don't care about knowing what has been—I only want to know what is. How smart you've made yourself, missy! You don't often favour *me* with the sight of that blue gown."

"I thought as we had company, papa—"

"Company! the young man from next door but three! That's his knock, I daresay."

Flora's heart gave a little flutter. She was thinking of those dreadful daubs up-stairs, and wondering whether she would ever muster courage to exhibit them—wondering a little too what this young painter, of whom she had only caught flying glimpses at a distance, would be like when she saw him face to face.

He came into the room while she was wondering, was introduced to her, and shook hands with her in a rapid easy manner that was not ungentlemanlike.

He was certainly good-looking, of that there could



be no doubt; handsome even; faultlessly arrayed in evening-dress. The only eccentricity in his appearance was the long fair hair. Flora had expected to see him in his black-velvet coat, with perhaps a smear of paint here and there to show that he had only just laid aside his palette, and, behold, he was dressed like any other young man, spotless, irreproachable. Flora was almost disappointed.

He was the easiest young man in the world to get on with, his communicative disposition serving as a key wherewith to open the doors of friendship's temple. He told them all about himself; his longings, his aspirations, his intention of going to Rome by and by for a year or two, to work hard; as if there were something in the air of that eternal city which must needs make him industrious.

He asked a great many questions about his departed uncle, whom he had never seen, and the strange life among the lonely sheep-walks, and thus drew Mark Chamney on to talk confidentially, and to tell his longest stories. Altogether it was a most cheerful dinner-party, much more cheerful than when Dr. Ollivant had dined with them; Dr. Ollivant, although far better informed, not being so good a talker as Walter Leyburne.

After the dessert, which was a success, in spite of the spikiness and stringiness of the tropical fruits, they went up-stairs together. It had been an extreme relief to Flora to perceive that the painter drank nothing but a tumbler of claret throughout his repast. He was not therefore prone to intemperance, which she imagined a common vice among men of genius who came home after midnight. It was so nice, too, to

find him eager to drink the tea she poured out for him presently, just as if he had been the most correctly-minded of the curate species.

He caught sight of the open piano while he was sipping his tea, and brightened visibly.

"You play and sing," he said. "I thought as much."

"Only easy music," she answered shyly; "little bits of Mendelssohn, where the accidentals are not too dreadful, and old songs that papa likes. I have a book full—dear old things, that belonged to poor mamma. I am afraid you would laugh at the very look of them—such faded notes and common-looking paper; but they seem to me prettier than any I can buy at the music-sellers'."

"I am sure they are pretty," replied Walter with enthusiasm; "or you would not sing them."

"His manner to girls in general, no doubt," thought Flora.

She went to the piano at her father's bidding, and sang one after another of the old ballads her mother had loved, the tender plaintive music of years gone by—"We met," and "She wore a wreath of roses," "Young Love lived once in a humble shed," and "The light guitar;" while Walter Leyburne hung over the piano enchanted, and looked and listened—there were no leaves to turn, for Flora played from memory—and fancied that his hour was come; that Destiny, which had done pretty well for him by flinging sixty thousand pounds into his lap, desired to bestow upon him this still higher boon, for the perfection and completion of his lot.

Mark Chamney lay back in his armchair, smoking

—tobacco had been the chief solace of his lonely life on the other side of the world, and it was not to be supposed that his little girl would deny him the comfort of his pipe wheresoever he chose to enjoy it—and watching the two figures at the piano.

The young man seemed all that youth should be—candid, generous, ardent. It was a curious hazard that had made them neighbours. It seemed something more than hazard which had created these two young creatures so near of an age, and with so many fancies and attributes in common.

"It would seem almost the natural course of events, if—" thought Mr. Chamney, and did not take the trouble to finish the sentence in his own mind, the conclusion being so obvious.

After having dutifully sung her father's favourite ballads, Flora ventured to speak, with extreme shyness and faltering, about painting.

"I'm afraid it is very difficult to paint," she said, in a speculative way, still perched upon the music-stool, looking down at the keyboard and fingering the black notes dumbly, as if seeking inspiration from sharps and flats. "I don't mean like Raffaele, or Titian, or any of those—"

"Heavy swells," interjected Walter, seeing her at a loss.

She laughed a little at this, and grew a shade bolder.

"But just tolerably, to amuse oneself."

"Why, then, you paint!" cried the young man, enraptured.

"I didn't say that."

"O, yes, you did. Pray do show me what you have done."

"They're so horrid," pleaded Flora.

"No, they are beautiful, equal to Rosa Bonheur's."

"O, no, no. And they are not animals."

"I insist on your showing them to me this moment."

Her father rang the bell, and ordered Miss Chamney's portfolio. There was no time for reflection. Before she could collect her senses, the book was open on the table, and Walter Leyburne was looking over the drawings, with little muttered exclamations, and frownings, and smilings.

"Upon my word there's a good deal of talent in them," he said cheerily, and then began to show what was wrong, where the drawing was out, or the brush had been used too heavily.

"You shouldn't have been in such a hurry to go into colour," he said, at which Flora despaired; for what is life worth to the artistic mind of seventeen if one cannot dabble with colours?

"Drawing is such dry work," she exclaimed, raising her pretty eyebrows.

"Not if you go into it thoroughly," replied Mr. Leyburne, forgetting sundry expressions of disgust and impatience that had fallen from his own lips a few days ago in relation to the muscles of a gladiator. "I wish your papa would let me come in now and then for half an hour, and put you on the right tack; and I could lend you some casts to copy. You ought to draw from the round."

Flora beamed with smiles, but looked at her father doubtfully.

"I don't see any objection," said Mr. Chamney;

"name your time, and I'll be here to see that Baby is an obedient pupil."

The business was settled on the spot, and a farther arrangement made, to the effect that Mr. and Miss Chamney were to inspect Mr. Leyburne's studio next day.

"It might amuse you to see a hard-working man's painting-room," said Walter, with extreme pride in the epithet "hard-working." "And if you will do me the honour to lunch with me, I'll make things as comfortable as a miserable dog of a bachelor can ever hope to make them."

This with extreme scorn of his condition, as if he were the most abandoned of earth's inhabitants.

Flora clasped her hands joyously. "O, papa, do let us go!" she cried; "I never saw a painter's studio in all my life."

Whereupon the invitation was accepted, Mr. Chamney desiring nothing better than to be led by the light hand of his little girl.

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## CHAPTER IV.

"I am too old for mere play, too young to be without a wish. What can the world afford me? 'Thou shalt renounce!' 'Thou shalt renounce!' That is the eternal song which is rung in every one's ears; which, our whole life long, every hour is hoarsely singing to us."

AFTER the luncheon in the painting-room came another dinner at Mr. Chamney's, a lesson twice a week, an intimacy which ripened daily—until after a fortnight of this rapid progress it suddenly occurred to Mr. Chamney that he ought to make his new friend, Leyburne, known to his old friend, Ollivant. The curious hazard that had brought about this friendship would be sure to interest the doctor; nor could he fail to be interested in that romantic notion which lurked unexpressed in the mind of Flora's father.

A little note from Mrs. Ollivant to Flora came just at this time:

"Dear Miss Chamney,—Why don't you come to see me? Perhaps I ought to have told you that I am an old woman—though you might see as much as that for yourself—with a rooted affection for my own fireside, so you must not expect visits from me. We are so near each other that I think I may ask you to spend your evenings with me now and then without any farther invitation. If your papa will come with you, so much the better. The doctor will always be pleased to see him,

"By the way, I hear you are a very sweet singer, and I must beg you to bring your music.

"Very faithfully yours,

"LETITIA OLLIVANT."

"Then the doctor must have praised my singing," thought Flora, wonderingly; "and he hardly said a civil word about it to my face. Only looked at me with those dark solemn eyes of his. So different from Mr. Leyburne."

Mr. Leyburne had been led on to confess to a tenor voice, and there had been evenings devoted to "La ci darem la mano" and "Sull' aria."

"We'll go to Wimpole-street this evening," said Mr. Chamney, when he had read Mrs. Ollivant's note.

"Yes, papa; but suppose Mr. Leyburne should call?"

"We can't help that, Baby. I'm always glad to see him when he likes to drop in; but we can't be at home every night."

"No, papa," rather regretfully; "but we were getting on so nicely with 'La ci.'"

"There'll be plenty of time for 'La ci.' You see, Flora, I feel as if the doctor ought to be told about our new acquaintance."

"But what can it matter to him, papa?"

"Why, in the first place he is my oldest friend, and in the second place I look upon him almost as your guardian."

"My guardian, papa!" with an alarmed look. "What can I want with a guardian when I have you?"

"While you have me,—no, dear. Only—only people die, you know—"

"Papa, papa," flying to his breast, and clinging to him passionately, "how can you say such dreadful things?"

"A fact in natural history, Baby. A universal epidemic. We must all take it, sooner or later. Don't be frightened, pet. I don't mean to say that I am going off the hooks yet awhile. But I made my will the other day—a necessary act in every man's life, you know, darling—and I put Ollivant in as your guardian and trustee. There isn't any one you'd like better, is there, Flo?"

"I shouldn't like any one. I don't want a guardian or a trustee; I only want you."

"And you shall have me, darling, as long as God pleases. May it be long, dear, for both our sakes!"

Flora echoed the prayer faintly, choked by sobs.

Mrs. Ollivant received them in her prim drawing-room, where not an object was disarranged from one week's end to another; the crimson tabinet-covered chairs—bought a great bargain by the country practitioner at a local sale—with their backs always glued to the wall; the tables with the same blotting-books and envelope-cases, scent-bottles and albums, which Cuthbert remembered in his earliest boyhood, adorning the chief apartment at Long Sutton; the mantelpiece ornaments of the same era; a grim-looking black-and-gilt clock in the sham-Greek fashion of the French Consulate; a pair of black-and-gilt candelabra sustained by sphinxes; some cups and saucers of Oriental ware; the looking-glass over the chimney framed



in black-and-gilt, corresponding with an oval mirror at the other end of the room; a pair of attenuated console-tables between the long narrow windows, surmounted by meagre strips of looking-glass, and adorned with more cups and saucers. The carpet was an ancient Brussels, of a vegetable or floral design, which had once presented the various colouring seen in mixed pickles, but was now faded to the palest of drabs, and yellowest of greens, and dingiest of browns. Altogether the room had a meagre and faded aspect; but Mrs. Ollivant thought it beautiful, and suffered not a speck of dust to rest upon the shining surfaces of tables and chair-backs.

She was sitting at her work-table, reading by the light of a shaded lamp, when her visitors were announced, alone. An hour's talk after dinner was the most her son could afford her, and the hour having expired, he had withdrawn to his study.

"Light the candles, James," she said to the butler, "and tell your master Mr. and Miss Chamney are here. I doubt if any other name would tempt him away from his books," she said graciously.

The man lighted a pair of wax candles in the Egyptian candelabra, which faintly illumined the region of the mantelpiece, and were reflected feebly in the dark depths of the looking-glass.

The dimly-lighted room seemed dreary to Flora, even after the barrenness of the Fitzroy-square drawing-rooms. Life there was a kind of bivouac, which was not without its charm. But here every object told of days gone by; of people who had long been dead; hopes that had never known fruition; dreams that had been dreamed in vain; the unspeakable,

melancholy that belongs to commonplace objects that have grown old.

Mrs. Ollivant, like her surroundings, had the air of belonging to an age gone by. She wore her hair and her dress in the same fashion that had obtained at Long Sutton seven-and-thirty years ago. Her dark hair was half-hidden by the Mechlin-lace lappets which had been one of her wedding presents, and fastened with a tortoiseshell comb that had been her mother's. So had the amethyst brooch which united her lace collar. Her iron-gray silk gown was made as scantily and as plainly as Miss Skipton, the chief dressmaker of Long Sutton, had made her dresses when she married. She had changed nothing—the hand of Time had even respected the calm thoughtful face, and had scarcely marked the progress of the quiet years by a wrinkle. Passion had ploughed no lines there, rancour had left no ugly imprint. It would have been hard to imagine a face which indicated a more tranquil existence, a serener soul. And yet there was an indefinable melancholy in the countenance, as of a woman who had only half lived, whose life had been rather like the winter sleep of hibernating animals than the ardent changeful existence of warm-blooded mankind.

She brightened, in her own calm way, at sight of Flora, held out her arms, to which the girl came half shyly, and kissed her with a more maternal kiss than Miss Mayduke.

“So good of you, Miss Chamney—”

“Flora, if you please, dear Mrs. Ollivant.”

“Flora, of course. So good of you, Flora, to remember an old woman.”

"I have not so many friends that I could forget you; and if I had ever so many, I'm sure I shouldn't. But we've made a new one, and papa is going to tell you all about him."

"A new friend!"

"A new friend!" echoed a voice by the door. They turned and saw Dr. Ollivant standing there with a serious attentive face. He came slowly into the room, like a man who was half worn out by the day's work, and shook hands with his visitors—Flora first, with a brief but keen scrutiny of the eager blushing face, and then with her father.

"And where may you have picked up your new friend, Chamney?" he asked, dropping into his favourite chair, while Flora, at Mrs. Ollivant's entreaty, took off a coquettish little hat and a sealskin jacket.

"Where did I pick him up? You may well say that. It was a regular case of picking up. I think I told you the other night that I am interested in shipping; only to the extent of a few loose thousands, but still interested." And then he went on to tell his story, at which Dr. Ollivant looked unutterably grave, as if listening to the confession of a felony, and speculating how he could assist his friend to escape penal servitude.

Flora watched him with the deepest mortification. He did not show one ray of enthusiasm; he did not attempt to congratulate them upon the acquisition of this treasure, a young painter with a charming tenor voice and the most good-natured readiness to instruct her in the art of correct drawing.

"If you ask my candid opinion, Chamney," said the doctor at last, with that brooding face of his still

turned to the fire, and not to his friend, "my opinion is that you have done a very foolish thing."

"Eh?"

"A most inconsiderate thing. You admit a young man to a position of intimacy. You open your doors to him, and make him, as it were, a member of your own family, simply upon the strength of his having had a particular man for his uncle, without a single inquiry as to his character, or the remotest knowledge of his antecedents. What is this Mr.—Leyburne, I think you said, the better for being the nephew of a certain John Ferguson, a man who drank himself to death in the wilds of Australia?"

"I owe John Ferguson every penny I possess," muttered Chamney.

"Perhaps. And I daresay he owed it to you that he didn't lose or squander every penny he possessed. At any rate I cannot admit that this Leyburne has any lien on your gratitude. And if you take my advice, having let a scamp into your house in an evil hour, you will take the earliest opportunity of kicking him out of it. Of course I mean in a metaphorical sense."

"I should hope so," said Flora, half crying. She had hardly ever felt so disappointed. It seemed so hard to find such a want of sympathy and friendliness in their oldest friend. "Mr. Leyburne is not at all the kind of young man to submit to be kicked, even by papa. And as for his being a scamp, it is very cruel and unjust of you to say such a thing, Dr. Ollivant, about a person you don't know. I'm sure if you were to see his studio you'd think very differently; everything so neat and orderly and, if one may say

so, gentlemanlike; and casts in the most difficult attitudes, beautifully copied in chalk. He showed us the copies, didn't he, papa?"

Mr. Chamney nodded. He had taken his lecture meekly enough. Had not little Ollivant been accustomed to lecture him two-and-twenty years ago, upon the subject of his inaptitude for the study of Virgil, and his sluggishness of intellect with regard to hyperbolas and parabolas?

Dr. Ollivant looked at Flora with a curiously contemplative gaze, half scornful, as of a foolish child, half interested, as in a rather amusing young woman.

"Very well, let it be so," he said. "We will suppose the young man to be perfection."

"He sings beautifully," murmured Flora.

"We will admit him to be an acquisition. Don't be alarmed, mother, Miss Chamney and I are not going to quarrel. You'll sing my mother some of those old ballads, by and by, won't you, Miss Chamney?"

"Call me Flora, please," she said, pacified by his half-apology. "No one calls me Miss Chamney."

"Not even Mr. Leyburne?"

"O, yes, he, of course. But he is a young man."

"That makes a difference, I suppose. Then I shall call you Flora; or, if you are angry with me, as you were just now, perhaps I may call you Baby, like papa."

"No, please, I can't allow that; nobody but papa must call me a foolish name."

The doctor's factotum now appeared with the tea-tray, and at the doctor's bidding lighted more candles on the old-fashioned cabinet piano. Mrs. Ollivant

made tea with the presentation urn and teapot that testified to her husband's skill in restoring health to the sickly inhabitants of Long Sutton,—made tea in the homely old English fashion, and was gratified when told her tea was good.

After tea Flora consented to sing, but not quite with her usual willingness. She had not forgotten the doctor's unkindness about her painter—her painter—the first genius she had ever known, the first human creature she had ever heard talk familiarly of Titian and Rubens and Reynolds, as if he had painted side by side with them. Nor did the doctor's grave dark eyes, fixed on her so often with a calm scrutiny, inspire such confidence as on his visit to Fitzroy-square. Then she had liked him, and trusted him, and been ready to open her guileless heart to him as her father's friend. To-night she looked at him with a new feeling, almost akin to horror, thinking that if God took away her father this man would only stand between her and the desolate outer world. This man would be her legal defender: perhaps her tyrant.

She had the vaguest notions of a guardian's power, what he could or could not do. But it seemed to her that his power must be very great. He was, as it were, a father by law—and would have all a father's authority, with none of a father's love.

And then that bare suggestion that her father might die, that an awful severance might end their happy union, had come upon her spirit like a sudden blast from the frozen north. She was half heart-broken as she sat down to sing her little collection of old ballads, and the voice with which she began the

"Land of the Leal" was even more plaintive than its wont.

O that she too might feel herself drifting gently away to that better land, so that when her father's time came there might be no parting; that she who loved him so dearly might never be left in the barren world without him!

Mrs. Ollivant praised her voice, but wondered she should choose such sorrowful songs—she had sung her saddest that night. She was very quiet all the evening, sitting by the fireside listening to her father and the doctor. Mrs. Ollivant's little attempts to draw her out failed altogether. She had a new sense of unhappiness since that brief conversation with her father, and felt as if she could never be joyous again.

Mark Chamney talked about Australia, his favourite topic, and Dr. Ollivant listened with his quietly attentive manner, saying little more than was necessary to keep his friend in full swing. Later he asked some questions about Mr. Chamney's plans for the future.

"You don't mean to waste all your life in that old house you have taken, I suppose?" he said. "It's very well for a professional man like me to live mewed-up in a London house all the year round; but I've always considered that a man is only half alive who lives always in the same place. You'll travel, I suppose, when the winter is over, and show your daughter something of the world—something more than she could find out from her maps and geographies at school."

"I should like it well enough," answered the other

thoughtfully; "only you know I'm a kind of patient of yours. Do you think I'm strong enough for that sort of work?"

Flora watched the doctor's face breathlessly at this point, but that calm visage told her nothing, or only that Cuthbert Ollivant was by nature serious and thoughtful, not a man to speak lightly or be lightly moved from any purpose of his own.

"Not to Mont Blanc or the Jungfrau, perhaps," he said with his quiet smile—that reassuring smile which had so often given birth to vain hopes in the breasts of those that beheld it. But then hope is the best medicine for a patient, the most potent stimulus for a nurse; and a doctor who was not hopeful would rarely cure.

"You're not strong enough to go to work in the same wild way you would have done twenty years ago," he went on; "but I believe change of scene and easy-going travelling—travelling is made uncommonly easy nowadays—would do you a world of good, as well as afford pleasure to Miss Chamney"—he could not quite bring himself to call her by her pretty Christian name yet awhile—"who must inevitably suffer if you keep her shut-up in Fitzroy-square much longer."

"But I am not shut up," the girl answered eagerly; "we go for nice walks—don't we, papa?—in the other squares, and sometimes in Regent's Park. I am quite happy in London. But do you really think travelling would do papa good, Dr. Ollivant?"

"I do, most decidedly."

"If so, let us travel at once. I am ready to start to-morrow."



"I should recommend waiting for fine weather."

"Then we will wait for fine weather. We will do whatever is best for papa. But he is not ill, is he, Dr. Ollivant?"

"Ill!" exclaimed Mark Chamney; "why, what could put such a notion into this foolish Baby's head?" A timely reply, which saved Dr. Ollivant the embarrassment of being obliged to answer with one of his professional circumlocutions. He felt as if he could hardly endure to speak anything less than the truth to this girl, even at the risk of breaking her heart. "Will you dine with us to-morrow night, Ollivant, and see what kind of a fellow our new friend is?" Mr. Chamney said by and by, when Flora was putting on her hat.

"Certainly. Miss Chamney's enthusiasm has awakened my curiosity. I should like to behold this paragon."

Mrs. Ollivant gave a little sarcastic laugh, like an echo of her son's scornful tone. His opinions were her opinion. For him to dislike or disapprove was enough for her. That slow solitary life at Long Sutton had given her only this one creature to love and admire. From the hour of his birth she had worshipped him, had lived upon the thought of him during their severance, and existed only to please him now that they were reunited. He was her fetish.

"Come now, Mrs. Ollivant," said Mark in his hearty way, unmindful of that ironical laugh; "you'll come with your son, won't you? Flora, beg of Mrs. Ollivant to come."

But Flora could not forgive that disparaging laugh, and said nothing. Mrs. Ollivant excused herself on

the ground of never going anywhere—indeed, her son had never made for himself friends, at whose festive gatherings she might have been a guest. He had lived his own life, which was a solitary and sequestered life, and she had lived only for him.

"My son will be with you," she said, "and he will be able to form an opinion of your new acquaintance. He is an acute judge of character." Her tone implied that the doctor was going to sit upon Walter Leyburne in the combined character of judge and jury.

"Papa," said Flora, while they were going home in the cab, "I begin positively to dislike your Ollivants."

"No, Baby," cried Mr. Chamney alarmed, "for God's sake don't say that. Such worthy people; such straightforward, conscientious people—and the only friends I have in the world."

"Except Mr. Leyburne, papa."

"My darling, we mustn't count Mr. Leyburne. You're so impetuous, Flora; and I begin to feel I have done wrong in asking him to my house—"

"Only since that horrid doctor has talked you into thinking so, papa."

"My dearest child, you must not say such things. There isn't a better fellow in the world than Ollivant."

"But, papa, it's more than twenty years ago since you saw anything of him; time enough for a man to develop into a murderer. He might be very well as a schoolboy, but I'm sure he's odious as a man."

"Flora, this is shameful!" exclaimed Mr. Chamney, getting angry. "I insist upon your speaking with proper respect of Dr. Ollivant. I tell you again, he is my only friend. A man who lives the lonely life I lived

for twenty years has no chance of making many friendships; and I rely on his protection for you when I am gone. There, there, don't cry. What a foolish girl you are! I am only talking of future possibilities."

"If it were possible that I could lose you, and be thrown upon the mercy of that man, I think I should throw myself out of the cab this moment," said the undisciplined Flora, sobbing.

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## CHAPTER V.

"Is it thy will, thy image should keep open  
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?  
Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken,  
While shadows, like to thee, do mock my sight?"

THE undisciplined Flora relented a little next day when the doctor came to dinner, and deputed himself with a peculiar graciousness towards Walter Leyburne. There had been time for Cuthbert Ollivant to think in the interval, and he had suffered no little shame and self-scorn at the thought of his petty burst of temper with reference to the unknown painter.

"If I am to be his daughter's guardian some day—and God only knows how soon the day may come—I have some right to interfere, so far as to prevent that good-natured simpleton bringing dangerous people into his house; a painter, too; and a Bohemian, no doubt. And that silly girl is evidently in love with him already. But it was foolish of me to lose my temper about it."

Very foolish, no doubt; and Cuthbert Ollivant was not a man prone to foolishness. He wondered at his own impetuosity, and determined to make up for his folly by extra civility to the obnoxious painter, by a calm and dispassionate consideration of the entire subject.

"A good-looking young man, with sixty thousand

pounds, bound to Chamney by the associations of the past, and met with by the merest hazard in the city of London. It seems like a story-book. And the natural conclusion of the story would be a marriage between the painter and Flora Chamney. I wonder whether it will end that way. I fancy that is what Chamney has in his head; and he wants me to approve."

He was walking up and down his consulting-room at the close of his day's labour, meditating upon this subject, as he had meditated many times during his daily round.

"After all, it would be the best thing that could happen for me. If she marries in her father's lifetime, she will want no guardian except her husband. And what should I do with a pretty girl for my ward? It's all very well to say my mother would take the care of her, and the management of her, off my hands. I should be responsible for her welfare all the same. And if she took it into her head to marry a scamp then, it would be much worse than her marrying a scamp now."

A quiet contemplation of the subject in this light was calculated to make Dr. Ollivant well disposed towards Mr. Leyburne; yet he had no friendly feeling for that person as he walked from Wimpole-street to Fitzroy-square. It was a calm clear evening, and even London in November was not utterly odious.

He found the subject of his thoughts standing by the drawing-room fire talking to Flora—talking as if they had been first-cousins, allied by a lifetime of recollections and associations. Walter Leyburne's frank fair face was turned to him with a friendly smile in the lamplight, as Mr. Chamney introduced the two

men; and the doctor was compelled to confess to himself that the face was pleasant, and even handsome. But, then, how many a scamp has a pleasant handsome face! It is almost an attribute of scamphood. A scamp with sixty thousand pounds, however, is a less common character.

Perhaps something in the young man's cordial easy manner pleased Dr. Ollivant in spite of his prejudices; perhaps he had schooled himself by an effort to seem friendly. In any case, he did make himself agreeable to Mr. Leyburne, and regained Flora's good opinion. He saw the change in her, and divined its meaning.

"To win her good-will, I have only to be civil to this fellow," he said to himself. "A poor compliment to me, as an individual."

The little dinner was the gayest they had yet had in Fitzroy-square. Dr. Ollivant would not allow Mr. Leyburne to have the talk all to himself. He talked of every subject that was started, and talked well—with that tone of calm superiority which superior age and superior learning impart—spoke of art even, showing himself master of all the critic's technicalities.

"I did not know you cared about pictures," said Flora, looking at him as if she beheld him suddenly in a new light, with some touch of wonder too, as if he were not the kind of man she could have supposed capable of appreciating pictures, or music, or flowers, or any of the more delicate charms of life.

"Yes," he said, in his quiet way, "I do like—good pictures. There is about one in every year's exhibition that I should care to possess."

"What a pity for all the other fellows!" said Wal-

ter, piqued by the conviction that the doctor would not like *his* pictures.

"I didn't see any pictures in Wimpole-street," said Mr. Chamney.

"No; the Wimpole-street furniture is my mother's, just as it came from Long Sutton—ugly, but familiar. It was hard enough to root her out of the Devonshire soil. I was obliged to bring away a little earth about the roots. In short, the old chairs and tables do well enough for me. I have not gone in for the refinements of life."

"Which means that you are a confirmed old bachelor, I suppose?" said Chamney, with his good-natured laugh.

"I suppose so. I believe it is an understood thing that a man who doesn't marry before he's thirty is a confirmed bachelor. And yet there are instances of passion after that age, or history lies strangely."

"Mark Antony, for example," cried Walter, with a keen recollection of that useful personage to the art-world, Cleopatra.

The dinner was altogether agreeable. Dr. Ollivant appeared in a new light—not the grave quiet physician, with dark contemplative eyes and a leaning to silence, but a man of many words—words that had a colour and sparkle about them, like finely-cut gems—enthusiastic, eloquent even. And above all, he was gracious to Walter Leyburne. Flora was subjugated; wondered that there could be such a clever man in the world, as it were unknown and unappreciated; for she reckoned it as nothing that a man should have secured a fair practice, and a name in his profession, at five-and-thirty. There was a latent bitterness, a

minor strain faintly audible in the doctor's most brilliant talk; a vague sadness that touched the tender girl-nature. She was inclined to pity him a little, as a man who had grown old in the dismal drudgery of a learned profession, and lived a lonely joyless life in a house that had a dreary look despite its well-ordered comfort.

She glanced from the doctor to Youth and Hope incarnate, in the person of Walter Leyburne; a creature all smiles and brightness, whose nature seemed brimming over with joy, like a glass of sparkling wine in which a thousand tiny bubbles come leaping up to the surface, as if they would say, "We are the emblems of all earthborn joys; see how soon we vanish!"

Yes; that contrast between the slave of science and the disciple of art touched her; so she spoke to the doctor in her kindest tones, out of pure pity.

The three gentlemen went up to the drawing-room with Flora directly after dinner, and she had Dr. Ollivant on her hands while she poured out the tea, Mr. Chamney and the painter having planted themselves on the hearth-rug to fight out a political battle. Mr. Leyburne was a Radical, who derived his principles from Shelley and Leigh Hunt, and was somewhat astonished to find his pet theories bear no better blossom than broken park-palings and trade-unionism; Mr. Chamney was a Conservative, on the ground of having money in the Funds.

"No man with an interest in the government securities of his country has a right to be a Radical," he said. "The man who has anything to keep is bound to be a Conservative. I was a thorough-paced 'rad' when I worked my way out to Melbourne; but the



day I began to save money was the day on which I went over to the opposition. Don't talk to me of the Revolt of Islam. What I see around us, sir, is the revolt of the tailors, the tinkers, the bakers, the candle-stick-makers—a revolt whose inevitable result is the impoverishment of the well-to-do classes.”

While they were arguing this thesis, Dr. Ollivant was making his peace with Flora. A pleasant business it seemed to him, that business of reconciliation—and so new. To sit by the lamplit table and watch the fair hands moving noiselessly among the teacups, the sweet face bent a little in womanly solicitude, the soft eyes looking up at him half-shyly, half-confidingly, now and then, as his words made some special appeal to her attention. It was the newest thing that life could offer him; as strange as if he had found himself emperor of half the world:

“You were very angry with me last night, I'm afraid?” he said, with a smile that was rather provoking, Flora thought, as if he remembered her indignation with some sense of amusement, as at the anger of a petted child.

“I thought you unkind and unjust,” she answered.

“Because I ventured to express a doubt of your paragon—not having seen him, remember, and being therefore unaffected by the magic of his numerous graces.”

“That sounds as if you were still sneering at him. But now you have seen him, I hope you think a little better of him.”

“I think him a very agreeable young man, after the pattern of numerous other young men. But I am not even yet reconciled to his introduction here—to

the privileged position which he occupies—while your father knows so little about him.”

“We know that he is the nephew of papa’s old partner.”

“I cannot recognise that as a certificate of character. George Barnwell was a nephew. However, I will say no more, since you like him so much.”

“I like him because he is so kind to me,” replied Flora, blushing a little, but still answering with her accustomed frankness. “He is teaching me to draw correctly, and he sings—delightfully.”

She would have used a stronger word—divinely—but checked herself, in fear of Dr. Ollivant’s ridicule.

“What! he sings, does he? It seems he has all the gifts.” This was said with a regretful sigh, that moved Flora again to pity.

“He is not a clever doctor like you,” she said, eager to console; “he cannot bring hope and healing to the sick and sorrowful, nor can he talk like you. I thought he was the best talker in the world, till to-night.”

The doctor smiled his slow thoughtful smile. Was it possible that his deeper thought and wider knowledge had impressed even this shallow frivolous girl; that she had discovered in him at least something which her new favourite lacked?

Not much longer did he enjoy the privilege of her sole attention. She was called away to sing presently.

“A duet, if you like, Mr. Leyburne,” she said. So the doctor heard the two fresh young voices blending harmoniously, each taking strength and sweetness from the other. If he had been a younger man—a man

without fixed purposes and desires to fulfil in life—he might almost have envied Walter Leyburne his pleasant tenor voice, seeing what a strong link it made between these two. But in his character of a man who had dispensed with all small passions and petty vices, sustained always by the real business of his life, he could only listen and approve; or perhaps speculate vaguely upon what that hypothetical younger man might have felt.

Once seated at the piano, Flora did not leave it till she rose to bid her visitors good-night. The old music-books afforded inexhaustible amusement. “Do you know this?” and “Will you sing this?” the two said to each other again and again as they turned the leaves. Whereupon there were attempts which sometimes resulted in success, sometimes in failure; efforts which were hardly intended for the amusement of the doctor or his host, who withdrew to the back drawing-room by and by, and sat by the fire talking. Dr. Olivant faced the larger room, and could watch the two figures by the piano as he talked—and did watch them, as if his words had been little more than a running commentary on that group.

“Well,” said Mark Chamney, “what do you think of him?”

“What can I think of him after so short an acquaintance, except that he is good-looking enough, and agreeable enough, and, I should think, conceited enough?” replied the doctor, with his dark watchful eyes upon the figure by the piano.

“There you are wrong. He has no conceit; on the contrary, he has a deprecating way of talking

about himself and his own ambition which is very winning."

"Only a novel form of conceit. The man who runs himself down is always a vain man. He is so assured of his own transcendent merits, that, out of mere condescension and good-nature, to let himself down to the level of the ruck, as it were, he pretends to think lightly of himself. I have seen that kind of conceit in my own profession. And then you admit him to be ambitious; *ergo*, he believes in himself."

"His chances of success would be small if he didn't."

"And yet, I suppose, he is a sorry dauber?"

"No, indeed. I don't pretend to be a judge of such matters. A picture to me is a picture, so long as there's plenty of colour about it. His struck me as rather bright and lively."

"Bright and lively!" said the doctor, with a shrug. "Yes, I know the kind of picture; the sort of thing that would make a good sign for an oil and colour shop. However, the young man is well enough in the abstract, Chamney, and I really don't want to quarrel with you about him. Only, to my mind, he is out of place in this house."

"How out of place?"

"Your daughter is young and pretty—rather romantic, I fancy. He is good-looking and adventurous. Have you never speculated upon the possibility of their falling in love with each other?"

"The very thing I have speculated upon; a thing I look upon as almost inevitable."

"O!" said the doctor gravely, with a curious little

droop of his flexible lower lip. "In that case I had better withdraw my objections."

"On the contrary, you had better give me a friend's advice with a friend's candour."

"And with the usual risk of giving mortal offence by my friendly truthfulness."

"Now, look here, Ollivant," said Mr. Chamney, coming closer to the doctor. "Of course I know that you're—well, say diabolically clever—and that it's only natural for you to crow over me now as you used to crow over me when we were schoolboys, while I was fool enough to like you in spite of the crowing. But this business is one that touches my daughter, and in anything that concerns her interest I protest against being crowed over. You must give me your advice honestly, without chopping logic, as between man and man."

"As between man and man!" repeated the doctor with a musing air. "I never quite caught the meaning of that phrase, though it always seems to stand for a good deal. Upon my word, Chamney, it appears to me that there is no room here for advice. You have set your heart on the match already; and the young lady," with his eyes always turned towards the piano, "seems on the high-road to the same way of thinking."

"Do you see any reason for supposing he would not make her a good husband?" asked Chamney, coming straight to the point. "He has sixty thousand pounds. I can give my girl about half as much; and he is a thoroughly good fellow."

"An opinion you have arrived at after a fortnight's acquaintance," said the doctor.

"Come, Ollivant, I told you just now I want advice, not crowing."

"What put this idea into your head?"

"Can you ask me that when you know my uncertain lease of life? What more natural than that I should want to see my darling married before I die; that I should like to know the man to whose keeping all her future life is to be given—all the long years which I shall not see; the years in which she will ripen into womanhood, and have children to love and honour her? I should like to know the father of her children, though I may never live to see them."

"Do you think a fortnight's knowledge is enough?"

"Am I a fool? No, it is only an idea in embryo that I have trusted to you. I am not going to mortgage my darling's future until I can see pretty clearly ahead. But I thought it only right to let you into the secret of my fancy; to let you see the young man, and form your own judgment of his character."

"I am not so keen a judge as to discover a man's worth or worthlessness in a single evening. I should think your protégé somewhat shallow and frivolous; but then that does not matter much to a woman, who is apt to be shallow and frivolous herself."

"That's an old bachelor's notion of women. Then you reserve your opinion, I suppose?"

"I reserve my opinion until I have seen a little more of your paragon."

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## CHAPTER VI.

“The Devil and  
This fellow are so near, ’tis not yet known  
Which is the eviler angel.”

“Rather the ground that’s deep enough for graves,  
Rather the stream that’s strong enough for waves,  
Than the loose sandy drift,  
Whose shifting surface cherishes no seed  
Either of any flower or any weed,  
Which ever way it shift.”

WITHIN a half-mile radius of Fitzroy-square there are streets which, although perhaps not absolutely disreputable—and it is not easy to know in London whether a street is disreputable or not—have a certain air of squalor, dispiriting to the mind of the wandering pedestrian or the cab-driven voyager who may happen to pass through them. Residents are doubtless unconscious of that depressing influence. “Be it ever so humble,” says the song, “there’s no place like home;” and the scene which, to the passer-by, is suggestive of low spirits may, to the inhabitant of the spot, breathe only of shrimps and water-cresses and the muffin-bell, and all the tender associations of the domestic hearth.

Voysey-street was a street of this order; a broadish street, and with ample room and verge enough in the way of pavement, but purblind at one end, which only held communion with the outer world by a narrow

isthmus of alley, where noisy children rioted all day long, and drunken men and women bawled by night, and which possessed for its chief attractions an eel-pie house, and a pork-butcher, popularly supposed, in the immediate neighbourhood, to purvey the finest pork in London. To eat spare-rib or griskin from Billet's was to enjoy a feast which Roman emperors might have envied, in the opinion of Voysey-street and Cave-square round the corner.

There was a court dressmaker in Voysey-street; a young person who exhibited stale fashion-plates and pink-tissue models of elaborate costumes in her window, and who made bonnets at half-a-crown, and dresses at four-and-sixpence, for the surrounding gentry, so that her connection with the Court must have been wholly a matter of imagination and door-plate. There was a chandler's shop at each end, and another in the middle. Indeed, the Voysey-streeters seemed to live almost entirely upon chandlery, and to be curiously independent of butchers' meat. There was a small shop for fish, of the dried and salted order, with occasionally a tub of bulky oysters, or a few limp-looking plaice, to be had a bargain on sultry summer evenings. There was a newsvendor, who vended a variety of other articles, in the way of tobacco, small fancy goods, brandy-balls and jumbles, fireworks in the festive season of November, and walking-sticks all the year round, and who retailed a good deal of information respecting the immediate neighbourhood gratis across his own counter. These, with one more, a ladies' wardrobe, were all the shops in Voysey-street; the rest of the houses were as private as any house could be in which several families abounding in small children inhabited the various



floors, whose lodgers, with furniture and without furniture, seemed to change with all the changes of the moon, whose front parlours were sometimes small academies for the instruction of youth, miscellaneous as to sex and age, whose back parlours sometimes sank as low as mangling. Perhaps one of the shabbiest of the houses in this region of depression and decay was that whose parlour-windows exhibited the flabby stock-in-trade of a ladies' wardrobe. It is curious to observe the air of squalor and disreputability which pervades cast-off garments thus exposed for sale; as though the mere fact of repudiation debased the things, like a son or daughter turned out of doors. There is a hang-dog aspect about that sealskin jacket, which whispers of midnight wanderings and unholy lurkings at street corners; an air half dejection, half indifference, marks that black-lace bonnet, with its garland of tumbled rosebuds and bent front. Very difficult is it to imagine fresh and fair girlhood in that crumpled pink ball-dress, or waving that broken fan. And that plum-coloured satin, gorgeous in its decay—who could believe that it was ever the garb of respectable matronhood? There are wine splashes on the skirt that tell of nocturnal revels, mirth too wild for gladness. The chance pedestrian glances at the window and hurries by with a shudder. Those tawdry garments hanging limply behind the dingy windows look to him like ghosts of the unhallowed dead.

Not thus meanly, however, thought Mrs. Gurner, the proprietress of the ladies' wardrobe, of that avocation which she had chosen for the support of her declining years. To her mind it was a pursuit at once honourable and genteel. On the gentility she dwelt

with peculiar fondness. There was no counter, she remarked, and there were no weights and scales; none of the paraphernalia of plebeian trades. Plebeian trades—chandlery, shellfish, sweetstuff, and the like—might be brisker; but they were inherently obnoxious to the mind of a bred-and-born lady, as compared with the exchange and barter of second-hand garments. That species of commerce was in a manner professional. You did not even ticket your goods, but speculated your price according to the appearance or disposition—as indicated by physiognomy and manner—of your customer. It was a matter, Mrs. Gurner observed, of private “contact.”

Mrs. Gurner's years had been declining for a considerable time, or rather had declined to a certain point, and there remained stationary. She had been faded and elderly when she first came to Voysey-street, nineteen years ago. She was faded and elderly still. It was believed in the neighbourhood that she had worn the same cap throughout that period—a structure of rusty black lace adorned with roses; but this was not strictly true. The substructure was possibly the same, but the flowers had bloomed and faded with the changing years; only never being new or clean, the change had not been noticeable.

“I suppose it's only natural that, having plenty of handsome clothes always at my command, I shouldn't care about 'em,” said Mrs. Gurner, in her low-spirited way; “anyhow, I don't. I should scarcely take five shillings' value off that plum-coloured satin if I was to wear it a month. Three-pennorth of benzine would bring it round again from any harm I should do it.

But I don't feel the temptation. Give me my old black silk; I always feel the lady in it."

A curious psychological fact this, tending to prove that an individual's inner consciousness may present to him an image widely different from that outward form which he wears before the eyes of his fellow-men. Mrs. Gurner, in the decomposed remains of a black-silk dress—a garment which was at once greasy, rusty, and of a dull greenish hue that suggested mouldiness, worn at the elbows, split under the arms, frayed at the cuffs, and ragged at the hem—may have felt a lady, but she certainly did not look one. But a black-silk gown in Voysey-street had a certain permanent value, independent of actual wear and tear; and as a man receiving the Order of the Bath writes himself K.C.B. or C.B. ever afterwards, so in Voysey-street a lady wearing black-silk raiment at once and for ever established her claim to gentility.

Mrs. Gurner, though she was given to speak of herself, in relation to rent and water-rate, as a lone female, was not positively alone in the world. Her son and her son's daughter shared her humble abode. The son pretended to do a good deal—he was a genius in his way, and esteemed himself, in a large measure, independent of the trammels that confine the footsteps of ordinary mankind—and succeeded in doing very little. He did, however, contribute to the expenses of the establishment in a spasmodic manner; or the establishment must inevitably have suffered that complete collapse with which it was periodically threatened by landlord and tax-gatherer. For it is not to be supposed that the profits arising out of the exchange and barter of ten pounds' worth of second-

hand soft goods could have paid for the shelter, food, and clothing of three full-grown persons.

Jarred's daughter helped her grandmother in the business and housework, waited on the lodgers, ran of errands, did whatever cleaning may have been done where everything seemed always dirty, and endured not a little reproof of a low-spirited kind, which the girl herself described as "nagging," from her elderly relative. The elderly relative "took the lead," as she called it, in the business, and cooked the viands for the family table; a work of extreme care and nicety, for it is curious to observe that people whose food is of a limited or even fortuitous character, mysterious as the provender which the ravens brought to the prophet, are apt to be extremely particular about the cooking thereof. Jarred was as keen an epicure in his way as any *gourmet* at the clubs.

That apartment which, in a more conventional state of society, would have been called the drawing-room, but which in Voysey-street was always spoken of as the first-floor front, was held sacred to the uses of Mr. Jarred Gurner. It was the most important room in the house and the best for letting, as Mrs. Gurner said, with her chronic sigh, and to relinquish it to Jarred was to relinquish a reliable source of income. But Jarred's avocations required a north light, and the first-floor front faced the north—nay, more, had a central window, which had been extended to the ceiling for the convenience of some artistic resident in days gone by, before Voysey-street had sunk below the artistic level.

Jarred was an artist, and the tall window suited him to a nicety. He was a professor of the art of

doctoring pictures and of doctoring violins, and wonderful were his ways in both arts, but most especially in the latter, which is an intricate and mysterious process approaching conjuration; since, by the application of certain varnishes and a smoky chimney, Jarred could sometimes convert the most commonplace of fiddles into an Amati or a Guaneri. He conjured a little with the pictures, too, as well as with the fiddles, and could transmute the handiwork of any out-at-elbows dauber in his neighbourhood into a genuine Teniers or Ostade, a Rubens or Vandyke, to suit the turn of the market.

Half the pictures in Wardour-street had been through Jarred's hands. The simpering, bare-shouldered, flaxen-ringleted beauties of the Lely school,—he knew them to the turn of their little fingers, the pattern of their lace tuckers; had sat staring at them meditatively many a night as he smoked his black-muzzled pipe, and wafted the tobacco-clouds across their vapid smiling faces, while he calculated the odds on an outsider or reviewed the performances of an established favourite. Jarred had various strings to his bow. He did a little in the stock-jobbing way now and then—of course in the pettiest form—took shares in new joint-stock speculations and sold them again, or failed to take them up and defied the directors, since it would have been throwing good money after bad to set the mighty engines of law to work with a view to making Mr. Gurner keep his engagements. He had put his hand to almost everything, as he used to boast in his playful way, “from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter.” He had even done a little in the private-detective line, and although a mere outsider,

had been acknowledged by some of the master minds in that noble profession to be good at following up a trail.

He was a broad-shouldered, strongly-built man, with something of a gipsy look in his swarthy face and glittering black eyes—small eyes, but with an unusual brightness that made them striking. Perhaps his gipsy life had given that cast to his features; that reckless, dare-devil turn to eye and lip, and even the crisp wave of his coarse black hair. You could have expected to meet him on a country common, with gold rings in his ears and a hawker's box upon his back, seeking whom he might devour. There was something gipsyish in his way of living even in Voyseystreet, and yet not social—a solitary Bohemian this, who liked best to take his meal by himself, at the snuggest corner of his hearth, in his one comfortable chair, and to sit alone and smoke and scheme afterwards. The women of his household were a bore to him. 'The wretched little room down-stairs, where they lived, and slept, and cooked, and ate,—the miserable make-believe parlour behind the shop, in which the bed by night vainly essayed to pass for a cheffonier by day,—was rarely honoured by his presence, and when his mother or his daughter came to his room, they knocked at the door in all humility before presuming to enter. Only when Jarred was in an especially good humour, when things had gone well with him in the City or in the betting-ring, when he had planted an Amati or a Rubens, did he deign to eat his supper with his kindred in the stuffy little chamber below stairs. Then his soul would expand over sprats or fried tripe, and he would tell them his schemes or

impart his indignation against that destiny which had not provided him with unlimited capital.

"I could do anything with capital!" he would declare. "Give me a thousand pounds for my fulcrum, and I would die the equal of Rothschild."

His daughter used to sit with her elbows on the table, although severely admonished thereupon by her grandmother, who never forgot to be genteel, and gaze open-mouthed and open-eyed upon her father.

He had contrived to instil into her youthful mind the profoundest belief in his genius, even without taking any pains to effect that end; for his wild talk of his own talents, and the things he ought to have done and would yet do, when Fate should cease her opposition, was for the greater part mere soliloquy, or the letting-off of the superfluous steam which a lively imagination and an extra pint of sixpenny ale will engender in the human mind.

Louisa Gurner believed implicitly in her father, and lived in a chronic state of anger against society at large for its neglect and ill-usage of him. It seemed a hard world in which such a man as Jarred Gurner could not have place and power, carriages and horses, a fine house to live in, costly raiment, and the fat of the land for his daily provender. There must be some cog-wheel loose, some endless web out of gear, in the machinery of a universe in which Jarred had to wear shabby boots and eat scanty dinners. This feeling, fostered by the father's wild talk, had grown with Louisa's growth, and now found expression in a lurking discontent which pervaded the girl's nature, and was even visible in her handsome young face; a

delicate likeness of the father's, the eyes larger and softer of hue, the mouth smaller and more refined in form, but the same dark skin and wavy black hair, the same half-gipsy look, the same defiant pride in every lineament. As the beauty of fallen angels was the beauty of Louisa Gurner; a fairness in which even admiring eyes found something akin to the diabolical. Yet, as Mr. Gurner was wont to observe in moments of good-humour, "Loo was not half a bad girl." Neither selfishness nor vanity found a congenial soil in the flower-gardens of Voysey-street. Other vices might spring up there and thrive apace; but for these delicate flowers of evil there was but scanty nutriment. Louisa, having never known what it was to find her inclinations studied or her desires ministered to, had resigned herself, even before she turned up her back hair and lengthened the skirts of her shabby gowns, with advancing womanhood, to take life as she found it. It was her lot to accept the offal as her share of the sacrifice, to sit in the most uncomfortable chair, sleep on the veriest edge of her grandmother's bed, get up the earliest in the house and go to bed the latest, run on errands in wet weather, wear her shoes long after they had ceased to be any particular use as a protection for her feet, eat the tail ends of mutton-chops and the gristly trimmings of the steak, and very often to find the guerdon of her daily sacrifice in a jobation from her father, larded with an oath or two, or an hour or so of intermittent nagging from her grandmother.

A hard life, and Loo knew it—knew, too, that she was handsomer than her neighbours, and sharper of intellect. Her glass—a sorry mirror for beauty, with



the quicksilver worn off the back in blotches, like a skin disease—told her that there was more of life and colour in her face than in the common run of faces, all more or less pinched and pallid and aged by premature cares, that belonged to the young women of Voysey-street. Nor was she often in the streets for a quarter of an hour without hearing some outspoken compliment to her good looks. But this knowledge inspired no vanity. What was the use of good looks without fine dress and a carriage?

"I think I'd as lief be ugly," she said to herself, "or liefer, for then I shouldn't be bothered or insulted when I'm out on an errand."

One solitary pleasure brightened this joyless life. When Jarred's temper had been sweetened by the prospering of some scheme, or the success of some experiment in the doctoring line, he would suffer his daughter to bring her needlework up to his room and sit there while he smoked, or varnished, as the case might be. She had her favourite corner by the fire in winter—Jarred always kept a good fire, however pinched might be the handful of coals in the shrunken grate below—her favourite seat on the window-ledge in summer, half in the room and half out of it. But only too rare were those brief glimpses of bliss, for, as it has been already remarked, Jarred kept his womankind at a distance, and Louisa's evenings were usually spent in a depressing duologue with her grandmother, whose conversation was at best a prolonged monody upon one perpetual theme—the hardness of life for the race of Gurner.

On this wet winter's night, less than a week after the little dinner in Fitzroy-square, Louisa has been

allowed to bring her work up to Jarred's room, a worsted sock of her father's which she cobbles laboriously. It is the only work she is ever seen to accomplish, and it seems, to the casual observer, always the same sock, the same yawning gulf sundering sole from heel, the same dilapidation at the toe; but she plods on mechanically, and makes no moan. Not that Louisa is fond of needlework. "There never was such a poor hand as our Loo at her needle," says Mrs. Gurner, when she holds forth upon her niece's imperfections. Loo has a passion for novel-reading and for music—will sit upon the ground or the fender, a slatternly crouching figure, for hours together, if only let alone so long, poring over a tattered romance, or will steal up to her father's room when he is abroad to pick out tunes, or accompany her snatches of song on the battered old piano that lurks—a convenient shelf for empty pewter pots, clay pipes, boots that want mending, and old newspapers—in one corner of the room. She is not voiceless, Loo, but has a powerful undisciplined contralto, which is the very opposite of Flora Chamney's clear carol. Nor is she quite as ignorant as the majority of young women in Voysey-street, though she has graduated only in the Voysey-street academies. She has managed to pick up some shreds and patches of education from her father—enough, at least, to teach her the sordid misery of her existence, and the bare fact that there is a higher kind of life somewhere beyond the regions of Voysey-street. She has learned to be angry with destiny for casting her lot in this back slum, and is in this respect unlike the aborigines, who talk as if Voysey-street were the world, and round the corner the edge of another universe which they

have no desire to penetrate. There are dwellers in Voysey-street who hardly know what it is to turn that corner in all the days of their life. Their ambitions and desires are all bounded by Voysey-street, and the court where the celebrated pork-butcher turns his sausage-machine. If they grew rich—a contingency remote to the verge of impossibility—they would make no eager rush to Prince's-gate or Park-lane. They would only riot in the luxuries of Voysey-street; sup continually upon tender pigling; wallow in the humbler varieties of shellfish; go to a theatre now and then, perhaps, or even take an eight-hour view of the ocean; but only to come back with hearts more fondly turned to Voysey-street. This is the condition of mind proper to Voysey-street—simple as the soul of the Hawaian savage, whose bread-fruit groves and coral-bound bays are all he knows of land or sea; but education had removed Louisa from this Arcadian simplicity, and to her vitiated mind Voysey-street was hateful.

She sat upon her favourite corner of the fender on this particular evening, sometimes darning assiduously, and sometimes stopping, with her sock-clad arm stretched lazily across her lap, stare at the fire and meditate, a slovenly figure, with dark hair loose about its brow, clad in a worn stuff gown, whose original colour had been disguised by dirt until it had as much depth of tone as one of Jarred's sham Rembrandts.

A slatternly figure, but somewhat picturesque withal, needing but transference to a background of Spanish posada to be as fine a piece of colour as a picture by John Philip.

She wore a little scarlet handkerchief round her throat, which made a patch of brightness against that deeper tone, and her dark eyes reflected the firelight; a picturesque light, which brightened the pale olive skin, flickered on the full red lips, set firmly in a thoughtful mould wherein there was a shade of melancholy too much for youth, even in Voysey-street. Jarred—smoking his pipe in luxurious idleness, after a couple of hours' gluing and varnishing, which he called a hard day's work—was content that his only child should sit and stare at his fire, but was in no humour for talk, and was not going to put himself out of the way for her amusement.

"What's for supper?" he asked anon, pausing to refill his pipe.

"I think it's tripe, father."

"Think! You oughtn't to think about a fact. It is or isn't tripe. You can't think about it."

"I beg your pardon, father," the girl answered meekly; "it is tripe. I fetched it myself."

"Then I hope you fetched it double, with plenty of fat; that thin stuff your grandmother gives me sometimes is no better than stewed washleather. Hark! there's the street-door bell. Who can that be to-night?"

"Some one for grandmother, perhaps," speculated the girl.

"Very likely."

But Mr. Gurner bestirred himself nevertheless, put away a dissected violin in a convenient drawer, flung a cloth over an ancient-looking Holy Family born three weeks ago, and attaining premature age as in a hot-bed or forcing-house; and having assured himself that

his room was fit for the reception of a visitor, went back to his chair.

"See who it is, Loo," he said.

But before the girl could stir, the question was answered by the approach of a familiar footstep, which came lightly and swiftly up the stair, while a tenor voice, at its fullest pitch, sang the opening bars of "*La mia letizia*."

"It's Mr. Leyburne, father."

"Yes, and I haven't touched that Dutch interior of his," said Jarred, with a glance towards a corner where three or four frameless canvases were piled against the wall.

It was Mr. Leyburne, resplendent in his velvet coat, and with a lighted cigar between his finger tips, who came into the room still singing, in the *primo-tenore* manner, all *diminuendo* and *crescendo*, and anon, having finished his final phrase, saluted the restorer with a familiar nod.

"Well, my revered renovator, have you been baptising a fiddle with the baptism of copal and mastich, or elaborating a *Raffaelle*? How do you do, Miss Gurner? You haven't touched that little bit I brought you, I suppose, Gurner?" with a rapid survey of the dimly-lighted room—Jarred had turned down the gas when he left off work. "Rather a tidy little bit, I flatter myself, and, unless I'm vastly deceived, a genuine Jan Steen."

"You wouldn't be likely to be deceived," said Jarred, with his plausible gipsy smile. "It isn't to be supposed you'd be taken in like some of our City customers—stockbroking gentlemen, who set up their villas at Tulse-hill and Clapham, with vineries and

pineries, and so on, and want genuine Titians and Veroneses at five pound per square foot."

"Well, no, I am a little better judge than your City swell, I hope. Still any fellow may be taken in. But I think there's something good in that Dutch bit. I got it of a dealer in Long-acre; had a couple of brand-new blue-and-green landscapes in the middle of his window, and the Jan Steen in a corner, poked away anyhow behind some gimcrack Dresden china. 'What do you want for that little brown bit?' said I. 'Seven pound ten,' said he. 'Give you five,' said I. 'Frame's worth the money,' says he, which, by the bye, is the inevitable remark of a dealer if you offer him a price for his picture. 'I'll give you five, and toss you for the difference,' says I. Dealer wouldn't—wished him good-morning—changed his mind and would. Tossed him for the two ten, and won the toss. And I believe he was glad to get the fiver. Turn up your gas, Gurner, and let's have another look at it."

Since his accession of fortune Mr. Leyburne had amused himself by turning collector in a small way, and had lined the walls of his lodgings with those treasures of art which he had amassed in the course of his peregrinations, and the greater number whereof he had intrusted to Jarred to clean and varnish. But he had not gone wildly to work, being a prudent young fellow enough in spite of his light-hearted gaiety, and not one of those young men to whom being left a fortune means ultimate ruin. He found a good deal of spending in three or four hundred pounds, and his chief delight was derived from the picking up of various canvases in out-of-the-way cor-

ners, every one of which, in its brief span of novelty, he implicitly believed in as an original.

Jarred knew Mr. Leyburne's ways, and as every picture which passed through Jarred's hands was worth a matter of thirty shillings to him, it may be supposed that he prophesied smooth things about these works of art, and only threw in a doubt or a rough word here and there to prove his frankness and loyalty.

The gas was turned up to its fullest—a couple of strong flaring jets, unshaded by globe or chimney—and Mr. Gurner brought the little picture and placed it on a dilapidated easel exactly under the light, while Walter Leyburne and Loo put their heads close together to peer into it. The girl had been half brought up on pictures, as it were, and had a mechanical knowledge of the various masters—that a brown-faced Madonna was a Murillo; a pallid or bluish-complexioned saint or saintess likely to be a Guido, especially if with saucer-shaped upward-gazing eyes; that sheep were never painted by anybody but Ommeganek; that dark inscrutable pictures relieved by dabs of the palette knife here and there were Salvator Rosas; and so on, and so on, through the whole catalogue of art. The Jan Steen was the usual kind of thing—an old woman peeling vegetables, and another old woman looking at her; still life, a brass pipkin or two, a bottle and glass on the table, a half-open door with glimpse of inner room.

"To my mind," said Walter, gazing at his picture with the fondness of a discoverer, as Cortez may have gazed at the Pacific or Columbus on the coast of America, "there's no question about that. If I were

hard up to-morrow, I shouldn't be afraid of offering that picture to the National-Gallery fellows. It's worth seven hundred and fifty pounds or it's worth nothing."

"I shouldn't be surprised if it were," said Jarred; and then they both went into the picture technically, and discussed its merits in minutest detail.

"It's the detail in these things that constitutes their charm, you see," said Walter Leyburne; "there's nothing beautiful in an old woman peeling onions *per se*."

"No," replied Jarred; "if I were a millionaire like you, I shouldn't go in for old women—no, not if they were Jan Steens, or Ostades, or Brauwers. I'd hang my walls with beauty. There's that Guido, for instance—that's a picture you ought to have. I don't say so because I've got it to sell. I only wish I was rich enough to hang it up over that mantelpiece. I should sit and gaze at it by the hour together, and feel myself a better man for looking at it."

Jarred said this with a glance at a large picture in the corner—a bluish-complexioned Magdalen gazing upward, from a background of purple sky, a masterpiece which he had vainly endeavoured to dispose of for a long time.

"I don't like large pictures, Gurner, and that Guido of yours is a duffer. Sell her to one of your City men by the square foot. She'd do uncommonly well between the windows in a Russell-square dining-room."

Louisa withdrew to her corner by the fire, but not to her favourite seat on the fender, nor yet to the resumption of her darning. She sat watching the visitor as he paced up and down the room, smoking his



cigar. There was little need for punctilio in this respect, since the atmosphere of Mr. Gurner's sanctum was at all times heavily charged with tobacco. Walter took the cigar from his lips every now and then to talk of art, in a wilder way than he had ever talked to his friends in Fitzroy-square, and with something less of modesty. Here indeed, in a chamber as it were sacred to the inner mysteries of art, his soul expanded, his countenance glowed with a noble fire, or a light which at least seemed noble to Louisa. He talked of himself, the things he meant to do in the future, measured himself boldly against the men who had succeeded, and declared his ability to match or surpass their work in the days to come. His wildest talk, however, seemed hardly the boastful utterance of a shallow vanity, but rather the bold defiance which a mind conscious of latent strength hurls in the teeth of destiny.

"They may snub me to-day, Gurner," he said, "but they shall change their note before I have done with them. Time and work, that's the motto for a man who wants to succeed, isn't it, old fellow?"

"Time and work," repeated Jarred, to oblige his patron; but had he been asked for his own specific he would more likely have said, "Time and varnish."

The young man had been stung by the rejection of a small picture in one of the winter exhibitions. Even the consciousness of sixty thousand pounds in the Funds afforded no healing balm for that wound. It was only by a little self-assertion, by wild rhapsodies about honest work and future success, that he could find a balsam for his pain. He stopped sud-

denly, in the middle of a tirade, flung away the end of his cigar, and burst out laughing—at himself—in the frankest, pleasantest way possible.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed. "What a consummate jackanapes you must think me, Miss Gurner! Only when a fellow gives one a slap in the face like that—a fellow one can't hit again, you see—the only way one can let the steam off is in talk. I daresay the fellows who rejected my picture—you've seen it, Gurner: 'Werter's first Meeting with Charlotte'—were right enough. I shall think it a daub myself in a month's time, I've no doubt. I generally do. But if there's any stuff in me, I won't have it trodden out of me, eh, Gurner?"

"I wouldn't give the snap of my finger for the opinion of all the hanging committees in London," said Mr. Gurner, with supreme contempt. "Prejudice and self-interest and convenience are the three judges that sit upon your pictures. That 'Werter and Charlotte' was a gem—full of beauty and expression—the still life admirable—the modelling—well, there are not many young men in the Academy who could touch you there."

"Don't say another word about it," protested Walter, gratified notwithstanding. "I am a selfish fool to come here and prose about myself and my disappointments. I hope you'll forgive me, Miss Gurner," he added, with that natural graciousness which distinguished him when he spoke to women.

"I like to hear you talk about yourself," the girl answered naïvely.

"Do you? That's very good. I fear I must be an insufferable bore. But then you're fond of pic-

tures, I know, and can take an interest even in a struggling painter."

"A struggling painter with a fortune at his back!" cried Jarred. "That's what I call a rum start."

"Now look here, Gurner. I'm not going to say I don't value money, for I do. I saw too much of poverty in my childhood—genteel poverty, you know, which is the worst of all—not to value good fortune. But I verily believe I could surrender all the money my uncle left me without a sigh, and begin life again a friendless lad in the streets of London, if I could paint like Etty or John Philip."

He kept his word, and spoke of his own struggles no more that evening, though he stayed late, and talked of art in the abstract a good deal, while Loo sat by and listened, and forgot for a little while that life meant only Voysey-street. He was very far away from her life, this noble young painter; but such an evening as this was an oasis in the desert of her sordid existence, and she rejoiced in the cool verdure, and quenched her thirst at the limpid stream, and put away all thought of to-morrow's waking, when there would be nothing left but sand and barrenness.

There was a warmth and earnestness in Walter Leyburne's talk at all times which made him almost eloquent, and though, perhaps, there might be little positively new in his ideas, he was so different from the conventional young man who believes in nothing but boredom, that he at least appeared original. His hair, his eyes, his gestures, were all brightness and vivacity. He was a creature all life and variety—de-

pressed one minute, elated the next, changing with a hundred shifting shades of feeling.

"Upon my word, Gurner, there is something extraordinary in this queer old room of yours. I always enjoy myself here; I suppose it's because you let me talk so much. I came out to-night in a fit of despair—the black dog had me in his grip—and I have talked myself into good spirits. Or perhaps it is your influence, Miss Gurner," with a friendly little look at poor Loo, a friendly glance that shot straight to her heart. Can a girl of eighteen exist without admiring something? and, after her father, Walter Leyburne was the sole object Louisa had to admire.

"I shouldn't think her influence went for much," said Jarred moodily, "considering that she sits there like a log, and never opens her mouth."

The girl coloured high at the reproof.

"I suppose it's nature's fault if I'm stupid," she said; "so you needn't throw that in my teeth, father; and I don't see that it's my fault if I'm ignorant. I'd have been glad enough to learn if any one would have taken the trouble to teach me."

This was true enough. She had besought her father, even with tears, to help her a little out of his vast storehouse of knowledge; but Jarred was too lazy even to impart the little he knew.

"I must protest against any insulting comparison between Miss Gurner and a log," cried Walter eagerly. "It is one thing to be silent—another thing to be a log. Now Miss Gurner is an admirable listener. I don't believe I should have rambled on half as long if it hadn't been for her delightful listening. She has a rapt look which inspires one—the lips a little

parted, like a statue of Wonder. I wish you would let me—I wish Miss Gurner would let me paint her in one of my pictures. I have an idea for something better than Charlotte and Werter—a subject from Boccaccio, or something in that way. May I paint you, Miss Gurner?”

“She’ll let you fast enough,” grumbled Jarred. “She has nothing else to do. But I don’t know whether her grandmother would like it. She’s precious particular in her notions, is the old lady—can’t forget that she was brought up to something better than buying and selling second-hand rags.”

It was as well to make a favour of the business, but Jarred, good easy man, had not the faintest objection. What if his girl—who was certainly a good deal better-looking than the ruck of girls—should captivate this young fellow, with his sixty thousand pounds? There’d be a stroke of luck. It was hardly likely, though. The girl’s surroundings were too much against her, and the young men of the present day are so cool-headed and cool-hearted, so keenly alive to their own interests. No, it was scarcely within the range of possibility, thought Jarred, looking at his daughter’s untidy hair, worn gown, and listless attitude. He was almost sorry he had not taken a little more pains with her. If a worn-out old violin, bought from a fiddler in an orchestra, can, by much labour and artful manipulation, be doctored into the semblance of a Stradivarius, why should not a girl like that have some capability in her that might be worth cultivation? But it was too late now; the chance was gone. There the girl was, unkempt, untaught, uncared for—a weed instead of a flower.

No one but an idiot could imagine that she would have power to charm such a man as Walter Leyburne.

"Leave me to talk over the old lady," said Walter. "I have set my heart upon putting your daughter into my next picture."

The girl brightened and blushed, but said nothing. This was a kind of praise, but, O, so different from the insulting compliments that had been muttered in her ear by wandering strangers as they passed her in the street.

The painter had been struck by a sudden notion that there was something original in the girl's face—something more than the mere pink-and-white prettiness which he could have for his model any day for eighteenpence an hour; something striking; something which—if he could only represent it faithfully—would make people stop before his canvas and exclaim, "There's a curious picture!"

"By Jove, I've hit it!" cried the painter, in a sudden rapture. "That for Boccaccio!" snapping his fingers contemptuously. "I'll paint her as Lamia."

"Lamia!" echoed Louisa wonderingly.

"Who may she be when she's at home?" asked Mr. Gurner.


"Keats's Lamia, the mysterious serpent-woman;" and then he spouted those wondrous lines:

" 'She was a Gordian shape of dazzling hue,  
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;  
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,  
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;  
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,  
Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed

Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—  
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,  
She seem'd at once some penanced lady elf,  
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self." "

"I've no objection," said Jarred, "provided you paint her here. You can bring your traps, I suppose?"

"Of course," answered Walter; "I shouldn't dream of troubling Miss Gurner to come to my rooms;" with as deferential an air as if Miss Gurner had been the daughter of a duke, who could be no more moved from her particular sphere than the stars from their orbits.



So the business was settled, Walter pledging himself to vanquish any genteel prejudice on the part of Mrs. Gurner, and the young man began to pace the room, talking of his picture. It was to be a bishop's half-length; none of your cabinet pictures, all finish and namby-pambyism, but a life-size figure, the very woman as she stood before him to-night, with those dark grand eyes, that ivory paleness of cheek and brow, those full crimson lips with their perfect curve, that loose shadowy hair—the very woman, only glorified by his art. By such a picture as this he might spring at one sudden bound into the arms of Fame. The world should find out that he had stuff in him—that he was not a mere amateur, a dabbler in art, serene in the security of a handsome income. No, Lamia should make him.

Lamia, or her representative, slipped from the room presently, unobserved, to "see to" the supper, or, in other words, fetch the beer from a neighbouring tavern, lay the cloth, dish the potatoes, and sub-

mit to a good deal of mild nagging from her grandmother.

"I may toil and slave as much as I please," wailed that victim of untoward fate, "watching the tripe till my eyes water, to keep it off the boil, but you can take your pleasure up-stairs, carrying-on with that young man, I make no doubt."

"I don't know what you call carrying-on, grandma," muttered the girl, in a low dull voice that might mean either resignation or indifference; "I haven't spoke half a dozen words to him, and I can't see much carrying-on in that."

"If he hadn't been there, I suppose you'd have come down-stairs to help me with the tripe."

"I didn't think there was much help wanted. I peeled the onions and fetched the milk before I went up."

"You wouldn't have stayed up there quite so long for your father."

"Yes, I would," answered the girl boldly, making a little unnecessary clatter with the knives and forks she was arranging on the shrunken tablecloth, of more than doubtful purity; "I always like to be with father. He may swear sometimes, but he doesn't nag."

The matron refrained from any direct notice of this shot.

"Ah!" she said, with a plaintive sigh, "the Gurners were always ungrateful. It's in the blood, I suppose. There's your father. I may toil and moil for him from before there's a shop open in the street till hours after the last of 'em has shut, and not get a thank you, or a civil word, if he's in one of his tempers.



There's my daughter Mary went off to the other end of the world directly our family troubles came, and left her mother to face them alone."

"Aunt Mary wanted to take you to Australia with her, grandma. I've heard you say so twenty times over," expostulated Loo, putting down the mustard with an indignant dab.

"Wanted me to go!" wailed the dame; "a pretty want, indeed, when she knew that going to Margate by water was a trial beyond my strength."

"You might have got over a little sea-sickness, I should think, to get away from England, after—after what you've told me," said Loo. "I'm sure I'd have gone, and gladly, though I'd had to go through fire as well as water, if I'd happened to be born in those days."

"*You!*" cried the elder lady contemptuously; "*you're* made of a finer clay than a Shrubson, I dare-say." Shrubson was Mrs. Gurner's maiden name.

"I've got my feelings," answered Loo, setting down the bread with a bang; "even the life we live can't quite stifle them. Hark, here comes father—and—Mr. Leyburne."

She gave a hurried glance at the dim old looking-glass over the chimneypiece, and saw her angry face and tumbled hair with an angry feeling in her breast. Paint *her*—a creature like her—whose odious surroundings seemed to be reflected in her face? Yes, paint her, for some vile character, no doubt. The serpent-woman, he had said—something frightful, revolting. Her sharp white teeth clenched her under-lip angrily at the thought. And she had been fool enough, at first, to feel flattered by the idea that he

could trouble himself to make a likeness of her. There was a little pause at the parlour door. Yes, Mr. Leyburne was coming in. She took a hurried survey of the room; so small, so crammed with furniture, so untidy; the too-obvious press-bedstead, a heap of her grandmother's garments huddled indiscriminately in a decrepit old arm-chair, of a fashion so lost in the gloom of ages, that Noah might have carried such an one into the ark for the accommodation of Mrs. Noah.

"Come in and sit down," urged Jarred at the door. "What's your hurry?"

The painter looked into the room doubtfully. It was not a nice room, but there was his Lamia, busy with a saucepan of potatoes. Should he go back to his own rooms and think-out his new picture with the aid of a solitary cigar, or should he stop and talk to Jarred Gurner while that versatile genius ate his supper? Jarred was an intelligent companion; there were always some stray grains of corn to be winnowed out of that chaff which formed the staple of his discourse.

"What's your hurry?" repeated Jarred. "You young fellows are always going to the Albion for tripe suppers. Why can't you sit down and eat your supper with us? The old lady there is a first-rate hand at stewed tripe."

Mr. Leyburne acknowledged a slight weakness for tripe, but tripe at the Albion—clean table-linen, spotless glass and China—was one thing; the same dish in this stuffy parlour might have a different savour. But then there was Lamia, and he had to conciliate the old lady. Moved by this last consideration, he

took his place at the little round table, at which there was hardly room for four. But Loo did not require any supper.

"I'm not hungry, grandma," she said, in her indifferent way; "there's no use in my crowding the table."

"The English of it is she doesn't like tripe," said Jarred, with his mouth full; "I never knew a woman that did. They haven't sense enough."

Loo sat down in Mrs. Gurner's easy-chair—the antediluvian chair—after pushing its various contents into a corner. She sat and watched the little supper party, and wondered what Walter Leyburne thought of the room, and her grandmother, and their life altogether, and whether he was very much disgusted at being obliged to eat and drink amidst such surroundings. His manner gave no indication of such disgust. He drank the sixpenny ale, and laughed and talked with all his habitual light-heartedness, having by this time put away his disappointment at the rejection of his picture as a grief that was past and gone. That ideal picture which was to make him for ever renowned had assumed a new shape. Werter and his Charlotte might wander out into darkness and chaos, might turn their faces to the wall; Lamia should open the stubborn door of Fame's temple, that mystic portal which he had been storming for the last two years with the battering-ram of youthful energy.

Jarred, warmed by the cheque which Walter had just given him on account of the Jan Steen, was unusually brilliant. They discussed all the pictures of the year; gave each man his place, rather lower places than the public had given; pooh-poohed the critics;

laughed at the mob which admires out of slavish imitation, as sheep follow the bell-wether; in short, they ran the whole gamut of that argument which is the chief consolation of unsuccessful men.

"You haven't been round here so often lately, Mr. Leyburne," said Mrs. Gurner when the conversation flagged a little, as the men moved their chairs away from the table, and prepared for their after-supper smoke on each side of the narrow fireplace, Jarred next his daughter, who sat almost buried in the shadow of the bulky arm-chair; "I began to think you'd forgot us."

"Then you did me injustice, Mrs. Gurner," answered the young man in his cheery way; "I'm not in the habit of forgetting old friends, even for the sake of new ones. And I've made some new friends, since I was here. Let me see, when was it?"

"A fortnight on Tuesday," said Louisa, from the corner. "I didn't know friends was made so quick."

"Good, Miss Gurner! I see you can be bitter and aphoristic when you like. Well, say acquaintance—or—no, I think we must call these friends. The circumstances are exceptional."

Jarred showed himself curious to learn the nature of these exceptional circumstances. Loo sat very still, curled up in her big chair, with her eyes shining out of the shadow.

Walter, inspired by sixpenny ale, gave full swing to his natural frankness and expansiveness, and told all that there was to be told about Mr. Chamney and his daughter. How Flora was the prettiest creature he had ever seen in his life; or, if not positively the

prettiest, the most interesting, the most winning, the most lovable.

"If I were to put her in a picture, I don't suppose half a dozen people would stop to look at it," he said; "for all that's brightest and best in her beauty would escape my pencil. There's something spiritual in her face that strikes one at the first moment; but after knowing her a fortnight, and seeing her nearly every day, I can't say where the charm lies. Is it in her soft gray eyes, I wonder, or the sweet thoughtful mouth, or the delicious smile that flashes out unawares and breaks up the thoughtful look?" This in a musing tone, to himself rather than to his auditors. "I really don't know what it is, and I won't attempt to describe her; but she is a most enchanting girl."

Loo drew herself farther back into her corner—coiled herself up in her obscurity, almost as if there had been some touch of the serpent in her nature. There must have been in her composition some latent vein of envy and all uncharitableness, some perverted feeling engendered out of poverty and wretchedness; for this praise of another's beauty stirred a sullen anger in her breast. This picture of a woman, charming alike in herself and her surroundings, wounded her as keenly as a premeditated insult. It seemed only a roundabout way of telling her how low and common and unworthy she was.

"Humph!" exclaimed Mr. Gurner, with a jovial significance. "And this young lady with the spiritual countenance is the only child of a rich father, your late uncle's partner, and you see her every day. That sounds like St. George's, Hanover-square."

Mr. Leyburne laughed in a comfortable, self-satisfied way.

"She is the dearest girl in the world," he said; "and I ought to be the happiest man in creation if I can win her. But you mustn't talk about any such thing, Jarred. I've no right to sit here and rhapsodise about her. It's all in the clouds yet awhile."

"I don't suppose it will stop long in the clouds," answered Jarred, with a faint spice of bitterness. "There can't be much reason for waiting when there's plenty of coin. It's only we poor folks who have to hang back from the church-door for fear it should prove a short cut to the workhouse. There's my girl there now, for instance," indicating Loo with a flourish of his pipe; "she hasn't a bad figure-head, and would pass muster if she was tidy and better dressed. Yet I warrant she'll have to wait an uncommon time before she finds a husband that can give her three meals a day and a house to live in."

Loo blushed scarlet at this paternal speech.

"Who said I wanted a husband, father?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Do you think a woman has nothing better to think of than husbands? I've seen too much misery come of husbands in Voysey-street. If I have to go out charing when I'm old, I'd rather char for myself than for a drunken husband, as I've seen some do in our street."

"A hard idea of life, as seen from Voysey-street," said Walter, with his good-natured laugh. "But let us hope you may not be obliged to spend all your days in Voysey-street, Miss Gurner. There are places where all husbands are not given to drink, or all wives reduced to charing."

"What's the good of hoping it?" returned Loo, in her dreary way—a manner which was a youthful reflection of her grandmother's. "I used to hope it when I was six years old, but I left off before I was seven; and now I'm nearly nineteen, and I'm not much nearer seeing the last of Voysey-street."

"Not much nearer, so far as you know at this precise moment," argued Walter cheerily; "but the possibilities of youth are infinite. Cinderella's carriage and Cinderella's godmother may be waiting round the corner for you. And now, Mrs. Gurner, as it's on the stroke of midnight, and I'm afraid I've been keeping you up, I'll say good-night." The elder lady's glance had wandered towards the press-bedstead lately, yearningly. "But before departing I've a favour to ask you."

The favour was Mrs. Gurner's consent to her granddaughter's sitting for Lamia; a request which the lady, although in the last stage of sleepiness, received with befitting dignity.

"Laminia!" she repeated; "I never heard of the young person. A historical character, I suppose?"

"No, not exactly historical; a character belonging to fable and poetry."

"A respectable young person, I presume? I couldn't think of my granddaughter sitting for any young person who was not a strictly correct character."

"Lor, grandma," said Loo, with a shrug, "as if it mattered in a picture! And as if anybody who saw the picture would know *me*!"

"There are plenty in Voysey-street who would know you, and even round the corner," answered the grandmother solemnly.

Walter, hard driven, and not feeling quite prepared to vouch for Lamia's unblemished respectability, argued that a fabulous young person was hardly subject to the laws that govern modern society; and that, moreover, perhaps very few people among those who paid their shilling to see the picture would have a very clear idea of Lamia's antecedents or moral character.

"There's something in that," replied Mrs. Gurner. "I have read a good deal of history in my lifetime, but I never came across this Laminia of yours."

Thus, after a little farther argument, to give due importance to the question, Mrs. Gurner expressed her willingness that the painter should bring his canvas and colours next day, and begin his portrait of the sullen-looking damsel coiled up in the big arm-chair, who evinced no personal interest in the subject.

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## CHAPTER VII.

"I am touch'd again with shades of early sadness,  
Like the summer cloud's light shadow in my hair  
I am thrill'd again with breaths of boyish gladness,  
Like the scent of some last primrose on the air.

But my being is confused with new experience,  
And changed to something other than it was;  
And the Future with the Past is set at variance,  
And Life falters 'neath the burdens which it has."

AFTER that quiet dinner in Fitzroy-square, at which he made the acquaintance of Mr. Leyburne, Dr. Olivant dropped in now and then, in a familiar way, to see his old friend—indeed, in his brief and infrequent intervals of leisure, and even at times when, but for this new distraction, he would have given his hours to study, the doctor found himself drawn, as it were, involuntarily towards Mr. Chamney's house. Mrs. Olivant perceived that the precious after-dinner hour in which she had enjoyed her son's society was now apt to be clipped and curtailed, for no stronger reason than that he had promised to go round to Chamney's. His mother felt this spoliation of her one bright hour. That after-dinner tête-à-tête by the drawing-room fire had been her daily sum of happiness. No matter even if he were sometimes silent and meditative, gazing into the fire, absorbed by thoughts unshared with her. It was all the world to have him—to be able to watch the thoughtful face, and say to herself, "This

great man is my son." Now she was being gradually shorn of her privilege; the after-dinner hour was shrunken to half an hour, for, on the evenings on which he did not go out, he was anxious to get to his books a little earlier than of old, in order to make up, in some wise, for the evenings he gave to friendship.

"I should hardly have thought Mr. Chamney's society would have proved so attractive to you, Cuthbert," Mrs. Ollivant said one evening, when the doctor excused himself from going up-stairs to the drawing-room at all, in order to go straight from the dinner-table to Fitzroy-square. "He appears to me a warm-hearted excellent man, but by no means intellectual, and I should have supposed him a dull companion for a mind like yours."

A dusky red glowed for a minute or so in the doctor's dark cheek as he lingered on the hearth, ostensibly to warm himself, really because he felt a little ashamed of his unfilial eagerness to be gone.

"I don't go to him exactly for companionship," he said, looking at the fire with that thoughtful downward glance of his, as of a man who lives within himself, and is always looking inwards rather than outwards; whose eyes, except for the mere mechanical purposes of existence, are of no particular use to him. "I go because Chamney likes to see me. He is a poor creature, without a friend in England, and would feel—what is that Scotch proverb?—like a cow in a *fremd loaning* if it were not for me."

"He has his daughter's company, and that young man to whom he has taken such a fancy."

"The young man can only talk about pictures

and sing duets with Flora; not much amusement for Chamney. Besides, my visits are in some part professional."

"Is he so very ill?"

Dr. Ollivant shrugged his shoulders.

"He is very far from well, and there is no hope of his ever being better. The end may come at any moment. I want to stave it off as long as I can."

"I can't blame you for wishing to do that, Cuthbert; and I won't grumble any more even if your anxiety about Mr. Chamney robs me of your society very often. Perhaps I was just a little inclined to be jealous, for I thought it might be the young lady who was the attraction. She's a sweet girl, and I'm very fond of her, as you know; but I should like to see you look higher than that if ever you marry."

"Higher? How much higher?" he thought wonderingly. For something better than youth, and freshness, and innocence, and a modest loveliness that was better than all the splendour of form and colour that ever went by the name of beauty?

"I am not at all likely to marry, my dear mother," he answered quietly; "and Flora would as soon think of marrying the chemist who makes up my prescriptions as me. In her eyes I am a superannuated bachelor. Good-night, mother. Pray don't sit up for me. I shall go to my room and read when I come in."

Thus, between friendship and science, Dr. Ollivant fell something below his former excellence as a son.

It would have been difficult for any one familiar with his previous way of life to discover what was the

attraction that drew him to Fitzroy-square. He was not particularly fond of music or of painting; yet music and painting formed the staple of the talk when Walter Leyburne happened to be spending his evening with the Chamneys, and the doctor rarely found him absent. He listened with sublime patience to Mozart and Rossini, Verdi and Donizetti, hardly knowing one master's work from the other all the while. He watched the two figures at the piano just as he had done that first night. He assisted at the exhibition of Flora's drawings—she was now working systematically under Mr. Leyburne's tuition—and pronounced upon the correct drawing of an arm, or the accurate foreshortening of a foot, and demonstrated to the docile pupil how foot or arm diverged from the laws of anatomy. Dull work enough, it might have been supposed, for a man to whom the best society to be obtained among professional classes would have been open, had he cared to cultivate society.

It had become a natural thing for him to drop in twice or three times a week, and Flora had grown delightfully familiar with him, yet had never put off that somewhat reverential feeling with which a woman of romantic temperament regards a man who is at once her superior in age and intellect. Let him come as often as he pleased, her manner always implied that his visit was a condescension. Let his conversation be of the driest subjects within the range of his knowledge, she betrayed no touch of weariness. He perceived this, and was charmed by it, yet knew only too well that her heart had its attraction elsewhere; that a certain light quick step upon the stair sent the

warm blood to her happy face; the sudden opening of a door and announcement of one familiar name brightened all her being like a burst of sunshine over a flower-garden. He saw all this, and watched it, and at times taught himself to believe that it interested him only as an amusing study of character; that he could look down from the altitude of his maturer years upon these butterfly loves, and, if unable to sympathise with so light a love, could at least feel kindly towards the lovers.

Was it not, he asked himself repeatedly, the best thing that could happen in his interest? Let Mark Chamney give his daughter to this foolish young painter before he died, and, lo, all responsibility would be shifted from his shoulders. He might act as her trustee still, perhaps; take care of her fortune; and see that this careless fellow did not, after squandering his own worldly goods, despoil her of hers. But of herself, of this fair young flower which in its delicate bloom seemed like a bud that had blossomed only to wither, he need take no care. Of a charge so uncongenial to his nature and his habits he would be relieved. Yes, it would be to his advantage unquestionably that this love story, just begun, should come to a happy ending.

Yet it was worth while to glance for a moment at the other side of the picture. If poor dear Chamney, on whom the hand of doom was too palpable, should die without expressing any wish about his daughter's marriage—die before the boy-and-girl fancy had grown into a life-long love—die before Flora's heart was altogether given to this shallow lover—what then? She would be his ward. His the precious charge of her

present and her future. His to advise, to dictate to even, were she inclined to any act of girlish folly that might imperil her happiness. She would enter his house as an adopted daughter. He could picture to himself how her presence would brighten that dull home; could fancy himself finding a new pleasure in home life. The fair young face smiling at him across his dinner-table. The sweet voice singing in the quiet evenings. He had no need to be a lover of music in order to love her singing. If she had spun, the sound of her spinning-wheel would have been melody to him. He thought how he might improve her education, which was of the common boarding-school type, and enlarge her mind. How his own old love of poetry, put aside on the very threshold of his scientific education—the younger and more romantic tastes and fancies of his boyhood—might revive in this Indian summer of his life.

Not all at once did these fancies become interwoven with the very tissue of his mind, until to look at Flora's gentle face was to speculate upon the position he was to occupy towards her in that unknown future—whether she was to be his ward or Walter Leyburne's wife! Gradually and imperceptibly this new and strange influence entered into his life, changed the whole current of his thoughts, and, but for his natural strength of will, must needs have distracted him from the chief purpose of his existence—that calm and patient pursuit of science which was to lead him on to greatness. Happily he had mental force enough to supply two lives—that inner life in which a girl's image made the focus and centre of every thought, and the outer and active life in which he

marched side by side with the deepest thinkers of his profession.

The dull winter days went by, slowly the fog-curtains rolled away from the house-tops, and London, which had been a kind of cloudland, where cabs and omnibuses loomed ghostlike athwart the gloom, stood forth clearly outlined in the bitter east wind. This the cheerful citizens called spring, and congratulated one another upon the lengthening of days; in which every street-corner teemed with the primal elements of rheumatism and tic douloureux.

Thus heralded came April, and found the Fitzroy-square household unchanged in its quiet mode of life, and waiting for warmer weather before essaying even so mild a change as a journey to some sea-coast or inland watering-place. Mark Chamney had, to the doctor's keen eye, altered for the worse during these months. He was less equal even to the small exertions of his daily life, suffered more from languor and depression, took a more gloomy view of his own case, and was more oppressed by vague anxieties about his daughter's future. But from his daughter herself he studiously concealed his condition, pretended in her presence to look hopefully at life, and in his unselfish soul was glad to find there was another object now to divide with him her care and thought, another footstep for her quick ear to mark, another voice to bring the startled happy look he knew so well into her face. Pure and serene affection of a father which can thus calmly endure division! That very look was keenest anguish to Dr. Ollivant.

For early five months the painter had been a constant visitor in Mr. Chamney's house, and in all that

time neither Mr. Chamney nor the doctor had been able to discover any harm in him, though the doctor's eye had been keen to mark any sign of stumbling. If he were, indeed, as the doctor affirmed, shallow and conceited, his shallowness was sparkling as the surface of a rivulet, his conceit the most inoffensive self-satisfaction that ever placed a man on easy terms with his fellow men. He was indeed a young man upon whom even small vices sat pleasantly. Carelessness, procrastination, frivolity, seemed interwoven with the charm of his vivacious manner. His carelessness was a kind of unselfishness, his procrastination a deferring of disagreeable necessities, his frivolity the natural outcome of a light heart. Mark Chamney, no habitual student of character, had taken some pains to study the painter's disposition, and after five months' intimacy had arrived at the opinion that it was a nature without a flaw.

"If he were my own son I could hardly think better of him," he said to the doctor one evening, when the usual Mozart and Rossini business was going on at the piano.

"People do not always think highly of their own sons," answered Cuthbert, with his cynical air; "you don't commit yourself to much in saying that."

"Why do you always sneer when I talk about him?" asked the other fretfully. "It's rather hard upon me, Ollivant, when you know what I've set my heart upon. Have you anything to allege against him?"

"Nothing. He is very well, as young men go, I have no doubt; only, I have seen so little of the species, that I am hardly in a position to pronounce



on the individual. If you put the thing home to me as a personal matter, I don't like young men; but as youth is an obnoxious phase through which humanity must pass, one is bound to be tolerant towards it. In a woman, now, I confess, youth is enchanting; like a rosebud when its petals are just opening, or a river a little way from its source. But a young man is like a young tree; an awkward slip of a sapling, in which it is hard to discover the promise of the oak. And as to what you have set your heart upon, as you say, now don't you think it might be wiser to let events shape their own course?"

"Wiser, perhaps," answered the other gloomily, "for a father who had half a lifetime before him. I can't afford to let things take their course. I want to see my little girl's future settled, before—"

He did not finish a sentence which for his medical adviser needed no ending.

"When you came to me that November night, Chamney, and we had our first confidential talk, you said nothing of a husband; you seemed content to leave your daughter to my care. Have I done anything to show myself unworthy of the trust?"

"You, my dear Ollivant!" exclaimed Mark hurriedly. "For God's sake don't think me ungrateful! I am content to trust her to you; yes, with all my heart, as secure that you would do your duty to her as that I would do a father's duty myself. There has never been anything to weaken that first idea in my mind. When I saw your name in the newspapers, and thought over our schoolboy friendship, the notion that came into my head about you seemed like an inspiration; only when I came across this young man,

and brought him here, and he and Baby seemed to take to each other—she so fond of painting, their voices harmonising, and so forth—another notion flashed across my brain, like another inspiration. You could still be her trustee, my representative when I am gone; but if I could provide her with a husband—a husband of her own choice, mind you, not mine—the idea would be in a manner completed.”

“I daresay you are right,” Dr. Ollivant answered rather listlessly, as if the discussion had outlasted his interest in the subject. “The only question, therefore, that remains is whether the young man is eligible.”

They said no more that evening. Mr. Leyburne and Flora left the piano very soon after this, and came to join their elders in the back drawing-room, whereby the conversation became general. Walter favoured them with a description of the works of various “ineptitudes” whose pictures had been admitted to the walls of the Royal Academy, tossed over the books upon Flora’s table, and talked a little of literature in the usual young-man style; pronouncing judgment upon hoary-headed sages, and patronising veterans with ineffable superiority. Dr. Ollivant, who was apt to grow silent when the painter talked, looked and listened, and anon departed, after his usual calm good-night.

“I lose all your nice conversation when I am singing,” Flora said, with a regretful look, as she shook hands with him at parting; “but, you see, we are obliged to keep up our duets. It would be such a pity to get out of practice when we have once learned them together. But I do like to hear you talk, Dr.

Ollivant, and I enjoy your visits most when we are quite alone."

"If you could be always quite alone," said the doctor.

"O, you know very well, I don't mean that. Mr. Leyburne is so nice, and has given me such help with my drawing; I can never be grateful enough for that. He has let me go into sepia at last; such a relief after that dirty chalk! Please come to see us very soon again. Good-night!"

So lightly dismissed! Rewarded for all his wasted hours—the leisure which to him was the fine gold of life—with a touch of girlish patronage; told that his grave talk was not altogether unamusing, in the absence of better entertainment. He walked homeward in the clear April night, the housetops beautified by the star-shine, but, when near the long dull street in which he lived, went off at a tangent in the direction of Regent's Park. He was in no humour for the tranquil silence of his library—for the study that until so lately had made the brightest side of his life. He felt as if the close dark house with its narrow walls would be intolerable to him. He wanted to think out something in the free air of heaven, to walk down the evil spirit within him; that evil fatal spirit which tempted him to brood upon Flora's fair young face with a fond foolish passion, senile almost as it seemed to him, who at eight-and-thirty had lived a longer life than the common herd of men—longer in labour and science, perhaps, but in passion until now a blank.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

"O father, what a hell of witchcraft lies  
In the small orb of one particular tear!  
But with the inundation of the eyes,  
What rocky heart to water will not wear?  
What breast so cold that is not warmèd here?"

THE Lamia picture had made due progress during the winter and spring, and, as it is almost impossible to paint a young woman's portrait without arriving at some degree of intimacy with the woman herself, Louisa Gurner and Walter Leyburne had by this time—while spring was still young and bleak and cold—become something more than common acquaintance.

Walter had worked harder than usual at this picture, and had been more constant to his first idea than he was wont to be. It was the first meeting of Lycius and Lamia, "about a bird's flutter from the wood" near Corinth, that he had ultimately chosen for his subject—a dreamy landscape dimly shone in the mystic twilight, and only those two figures, youth and passion incarnate.

During the first few sittings he had found his model curiously silent and shy, and had even begun to think she must be, as her father had hinted, a dull and stupid young person at best. She had been obedient and submissive to his orders; had stood patiently in the attitude in which he placed her; had

never yawned, or shifted from one foot to the other, throwing every line of the figure wrong in an instant, as hireling models were apt to do. But for some time his little attempts at conversation, prompted by civility or even kindness, had been futile. He could obtain nothing more than monosyllabic replies or the most commonplace little remarks, which sounded like a mere echo of Mrs. Gurner.

Yet he could hardly bring himself to believe her utterly stupid. Those great dark eyes, which he strove to produce upon his canvas, had at times such a look of depth, as though unfathomable wells of thought and feeling lay beneath their shining surface; those lips had grave and pathetic curves, which he would have chosen for his type of passion and sorrow from all the lips in creation. Yes, there must be a soul lurking in this neglected form—a soul of wider capabilities than common souls—a mind that lacked only the light of education. He had not spent three mornings at his new picture before a new idea flashed into his busy brain. What a glorious thing it would be to illumine the outer darkness in which this poor child lived—to redeem this imprisoned soul from its bondage—or, in plain words, to educate Jarred Gurner's daughter!

If the picture were to be a success, now, it would be a generous and appropriate act to make the girl some worthy recompense for her trouble. He would owe half his fame to her peculiar beauty. He might never have thought of his subject had not her face put the Lamia fancy into his head. What recompense could be better for her than three or four years in a good school? She had talked despairingly of Voysey-

street as a world from which she saw no avenue of escape. To place her in some pleasant suburban seminary—such an establishment as that of Miss Mayduke's, of whom Flora was so fond of talking—would be to rescue her at once from her sordid surroundings, to lift her out of the kennel in which she had grovelled so long. And afterwards, when her education and his patronage ended together? Why, then her future would be in a manner in her own hands. A woman with a good education may do so many things. She may turn governess or companion—there is of course a perennial demand for either article—or she may go in for book-keeping, and earn a handsome living in some commercial establishment.

"Yes," said the painter to himself, as decisively as if he had sworn to do this thing, "if the *Lamia* is a success, I will give Loo three years at a good boarding-school."

It was a mere fancy of his to make the benefit contingent on the future of his picture, since he could have very well afforded to do this good work. A young man of simple habits and an income of three thousand a year has ample margin for benevolence; but an unsuccessful man is apt to feel churlishly disposed towards his fellow creatures, and Walter Leyburne felt that if the picture were a failure, his model's welfare would be a matter of small importance to him.

In the meantime, however, he found some amusement in educating the young lady himself, not according to any system or educational process known to trained instructors, but in that desultory and fragmentary mode in which the teacher follows the bent

of his own mind, and seeks first of all his own amusement.

After three or four sittings Loo had brightened wonderfully; the shy restrained manner wore off. She ceased to torment herself with an angry feeling that this spoiled child of fortune must needs despise herself and all her surroundings; that he was only civil to her out of a scornful pity; that he deemed her of a different clay from that young lady of whom he had spoken with such loving admiration. He was so thoroughly kind that her rebellious heart could not long hold out against him. Her face lighted up at sight of him. Those days in which he spent all the lightest hours in her father's room—they two alone together for the most part—became intervals of happiness. It was quite a new feeling to her. Her only idea of pleasure until now had been to sit on the fender while her father worked or smoked, in those rare intervals of indulgence when this privilege was permitted to her; but even these glimpses of sunshine were apt to end in storm and darkness. Something would go wrong about the supper, or he would receive an unpleasant letter, or a call from some one to whom he owed money, and in any case would vent his ill-temper upon her. Walter Leyburne was kinder than her father at his kindest, and was never ill-tempered.

Little by little she contrived to make some slight amendment in her appearance. Her hair was better brushed, and neatly arranged in that classic style which the painter had taught her; the old green stuff gown was more carefully mended. She had an object in life, and grudged no labour to make herself decent.

She had tried to extort a gown from her grandmother's generosity, a gown out of the stock; but the old lady was adamant.

"If I once allowed the stock to be tampered with, I should never know where I was," she said. "The business would go to pieces in no time. I must have a good show of variety—something to catch every eye. There's that plum-coloured satin, for instance; it's very slow to sell, but I've had a good bit of money out of that gown from first to last. Young women come in and look at it, and make a bargain about it, and agree to buy it by weekly instalments, and leave a deposit of half-a-crown or eighteenpence, and never come nigh the place again. Change their minds, I suppose, or find it's beyond their means. One middle-aged lady, in the public line, paid me six instalments as regular as clockwork, and after that never come anigh me. Such is the fickleness of human nature. No, Louisa, I will never consent to tamper with the stock. If you won't do for Laminia in your green merino, which must have cost seven-and-sixpence a yard when it was new—"

"I daresay it did, grandma; for that must have been when merinoes were first invented."

"He can go elsewhere and paint some other young woman, and pay her for her trouble, which he doesn't you," continued Mrs. Gurner, without noticing the pert interruption.

"If he doesn't pay me, grandma, he pays father plenty of money."

"That's as may be. I don't often see the colour of it. There's half a dozen rates on the chimney-piece; and if we've water for our tea this very after-



noon, it's more than I expect; for the collector threatened to cut it off three weeks ago."

Though the sittings took place in Mr. Gurner's room, that gentleman was rarely present. He had made it a point that the thing should be done under his own roof—that his daughter 'in her dealings with this stranger should be, as it were, guarded by the ægis of his parental character, surrounded with the sacred influences of the domestic hearth; and having secured this point, he appeared somewhat indifferent to details. He was by nature an idler and a loafer, and so long as the sting of the foul serpent, poverty, pierced not too keenly, he would take his ease—preferring to roam the world at random in pursuit of stray gleams of good luck, to toiling at home at the slow drudgery of his art. Thus it happened that the painter and his model had the shabby first-floor front for the most part to themselves, and Walter had ample leisure for that educational process to which his fancy inclined. Mrs. Gurner, always a stickler for the observance of social laws as understood in the unwritten code of Voysey-street, did occasionally interrupt the sitting by a stately visit, begging to be allowed to see the picture, and favouring the painter with her ideas upon his particular work, and art in general.

"Give me the old masters, Mr. Leyburne," she would remark in conclusion, "without meaning any disrespect to you; for I make no doubt when Laminia comes out a little clearer the picture will be very taking. But don't tell me about your Millisses, and your Belmores, and your 'Olman 'Unts. Give me the old masters. Look at the tone and the mellowness

of 'em, everything subdued down into a beautiful rich brown, and as smooth as a mahogany table. Why, if you put your nose against one of them Millisses it's as rough as a gravel path, all the paint laid on in splotches and ridges, as if it had been painted with a curry-comb. Give me a Rembren, or a Vandilk; there's as fine a tone in one of their Holy Families as in a Stradivarius violin."

To such art-criticism as this Mr. Leyburne could only defer in all humility.

"I have unbounded respect for the old masters," he said; "Rubens and Vandyke were giants. Yes, Mrs. Gurner, the old masters were fine fellows. Even Sir Joshua was knocked backwards by them. He saw something in the Italian school that modern art—even his—could never compass."

Mrs. Gurner's visit generally ended in a luncheon, respectfully suggested and paid for by the painter. He would run across to the fish-shop and order a liberal supply of oysters, adding thereto a handsome allowance of Edinburgh ale from the handiest public-house; and in ten minutes or so Jarred's table would be cleared of its litter of papers and glue-pots and brushes and files and gimlets, and a gipsy kind of repast spread thereon. Loo, with that new-born instinct of hers tending towards order, contrived that there should always be a clean tablecloth ready on these occasions, even though she had to wash it in a handbasin at midnight after her father's supper.

Mr. Leyburne derived a curious kind of enjoyment from these gipsy meals—a pleasure keener than, if not so pure as, that which he felt in the Fitzroy-square dinners. Outspoken as he might be in Miss

Chamney's presence, having at no time any evil thought to conceal, any cloven foot to cover with the drapery of polite language, his soul expanded yet more fully here, and Self, that agreeable creature, stood boldly forth in its brightest colours. He knew that he was admired, that Louisa believed in him as an African believes in his fetish. Little words, little looks, unconscious of their own force and meaning, had revealed as much as this, and the young man enjoyed the sunshine, without after-thought for himself or any one. He had never in his life had an after-thought. He was, indeed, serene in the consciousness of benevolent intentions towards this poor foolish child; that idea of the boarding-school shut the door upon every anxious thought. Let her worship him a little, if she liked, in the present; the worship had already lent a new refinement to her manner, a spirituality to her strangely handsome face. She was being educated in the best possible school for a woman's progress—a school in which sentiment and sympathy eked out the words of the teacher.

Even Mrs. Gurner's presence at these gipsy banquets took nothing from their pleasantness. She was not perhaps the companion whom one would have selected for a tête-à-tête repast; but as a third the painter found her an agreeable study of character. She made odd remarks of the Malaprop order—warmed a little with the influence of bottled ale, and cast off that heavy burden of misery which she was wont to carry through life. She philosophised upon life—as a maze whereof the devious turnings, and windings, and unexpected no-thoroughfares had sorely perplexed her spirit. She discoursed of her own past

—those natural hopes and expectations of a well-brought-up young woman which after-experience had disappointed. But of that bygone period she spoke always vaguely; and the status she had originally held, and the causes of her downfall, were alike unrevealed to the painter. Even in the most confidential moments, made garrulous with ale and oysters, she never descended from the cloudland of generalities to the solid ground of particulars.

"Life is an enigma, Mr. Leyburne," she remarked one day, with a faint moan.

"Life, madam," replied the painter, who always affected a certain ceremoniousness in his converse with the lady,—“life has been compared to a froward child, which must be rocked in its cradle, or narcotised with Daffy’s Elixir till it falls asleep; a comparison, oddly enough, to be found verbatim in the works of three distinguished writers—Sir William Temple, Voltaire, and Goldsmith.”

"Ah," said the matron sententially, "there are some children that don't get Daffy's Elixir. It's all vaccination, and measles, and rhubarb-powders for some of us."

"There, grandma," exclaimed Loo, with a shrug of her slim shoulders, "don't be dreary; Mr. Leyburne doesn't come here for dreariness."

"It's all very well at your age, Louisa," answered Mrs. Gurner, with chilling dignity; "but when you come to my time of life—"

"Which I'm sure I hope I never shall, grandma, if I'm to come to it in Voysey-street."

"You would have fallen a good deal lower in the world but for me, Louisa. The ladies'-wardrobe

business was my idea. Your father wouldn't have cared if we'd sunk to chandlery and Neville's bread."

"I should have liked the chandlery better, for my part," replied the incorrigible damsel. "The trade would have been brisk, at any rate. I'd rather sell tea, and sugar, and candles, and Neville's bread, and spiced beef, any day than dawdle over old gowns and moth-eaten furs that nobody ever seems to want to buy. Yes, even if I had to serve all the small children in the neighbourhood with ha'porths of sugar-candy."

Mrs. Gurner shook her head with the shake of calm despair.

"To think that such low instincts should crop up in a child of mine," she said, "after the trouble I took to fix upon a genteel business—no counter, no scales and weights, nothing humbling to the feelings."

"No; and no till and no profits, mostly!" answered Loo.

Those gipsy banquets, however, delightful as they might be, were not quite the sweetest hours of Loo's new life. It was when the painter and she were alone together that she knew perfect happiness—a rapture of content so strange in its utter novelty. His talk was no longer mere civility, or frivolous commonplace, intended to set her at her ease with him. He talked to her now as if she were on an intellectual level with himself; opened his heart and mind; told his hopes, and dreams, and fears; the story of his past; the scheme of his future; all his wildest fancies, which shifted like the figures in a kaleidoscope, but with far more variety of form and colour, and which never repeated themselves. He would talk to her as he had

never ventured to talk to Flora—with a certain Bohemian recklessness, but no shadow of evil thought. He was, in fact, not particularly anxious to retain her good opinion, as he was with regard to Flora, and he let her see odd corners in his mind, which, despite his habitual candour, he had kept hidden from the young lady in Fitzroy-square. Flora was to be his wife some day; he looked upon that as a settled question, and she had therefore something of a sacred character in his mind. Not to her could he pour out his mind in all its fulness, as he could to this quick-witted young woman in Voysey-street; who, by reason of her early-acquired knowledge of life's darker side, seemed to be ten years older than Mark Chamney's daughter.

When he fancied that she was tired of standing, though he could never extort a complaint from her, or even an admission of weariness, he would suspend his work for a little while, being perhaps somewhat tired himself, and read to her. He took some pride in his reading, and read well, in a passionate impetuous way. This began by his reading *Lamia*, so that she might understand the story of which she was the heroine. The vivid passionate verse, so new to her unaccustomed ears, seemed like enchantment. Her own reading had lain chiefly in the direction of penny numbers—pirates and bandit chiefs, and gipsy maidens, and *tout le tremblement*. This first glimpse of real poetry—all glow, and grace, and beauty—moved her curiously. It was then that all semblance of stupidity disappeared, and Walter Leyburne discovered that his surmise had been correct. Those broad temples were the indication of a powerful mind;

a mind hid in darkness, but with infinite capacity. He had that happy thought about the boarding-school at once, and determined to educate her, for her profit and his own amusement meanwhile. He read her the whole of Keats; and then, finding her delight unabated, her hunger for eloquent verse only whetted, he opened the vast treasure-house of Shakespeare. He began with *Romeo and Juliet*, which entranced her. *Hamlet* she thought dull; the *Midsummer Night's Dream* silly, except the scenes between Hermia and Helena. She warmed to *Othello*, and wept at the overthrow of that heroic soul. *Macbeth* was like a vision of a strange world, a region of passions grander than she had ever dreamed of, and she followed every line of those vivid pictures with intensest appreciation. No young woman who had been spoon-fed with "Gems of Shakespeare" at school could have warmed to that mighty voice as she did, to whom the whole was new. It seemed to her as if she had only just begun to live; or had emerged from some dark antechamber of the earth into fairyland. What did Voysey-street matter to her now? One street was as good as another to live in if she could have such a book as that to read, and such a friend as Mr. Leyburne to guide her in this new world of light, and life, and poetry.

He let her revel in Shakespeare till she knew all the great tragedies, and then called up another and younger spirit.

"Shakespeare is too heavy for my humour this morning," he said one day, and produced a neat little morocco-bound volume from his pocket, which he opened thoughtfully, and anon took two or three

turns up and down the room before he began to read.

He read, or in part recited, the whole of the *Giaour*, without pausing for a word of criticism. It was his masterpiece in the way of recitation, and he put his heart into every line. When he stood motionless, with downward-bending eyes, and began those thrilling lines:

"He who hath bent him o'er the dead,"

the girl's rapture broke forth in a passionate sob, but was as suddenly stifled, and she listened calmly to the end.

"That isn't Shakespeare," she said.

"No."

"Nor Keats."

"No. I'm glad you begin to discriminate the differences of style."

"I didn't think that human beings could write like that," said the girl with a gasp. "Where is he—the man that wrote about Leila?"

"Why?"

"Because I should like to go to him, and kneel down before him, and ask lief to worship him."

"Rather a foolish proceeding, if he were alive," answered Mr. Leyburne; "but you may go and worship at his grave. He is dead."

Loo burst out crying. The nerves, unstrung by those divine verses, gave way at the thought that he who penned them was dust.

"I shall never read you anything of Byron's again," said Mr. Leyburne severely.

"What! Did he write more than that?"



"Much more."

"O, but you will read the rest, won't you?"

"When your nerves are stronger."

He brought a volume of Milton at the next sitting, but Loo looked tired after the first page of *Paradise Lost*, and confessed her indifference. She liked the "Hymn of the Nativity," however, though the classic names in it mystified her. The strong music pleased her keen ear for numbers.

Thus her education progressed with the picture. Mr. Leyburne left her his books to read at her leisure, a period only to be found after midnight; and she sat up into the small hours, when Mrs. Gurner was calmly reposing in the press-bedstead, and aroused that careful housewife's ire by an undue consumption of candle.

An education such as this—the world of poetry suddenly unveiled to an intelligence sharpened by privation and the bitter experiences of Voysey-street—effected a strangely rapid transformation in this ardent undisciplined nature. This girl's mind was empty of all those objects which distract the attention, or even absorb the mind, of the happier portion of womankind. Dress, pleasure, society, had for her no existence. Half the dreariness of her past life had arisen from the fact that, except cares and troubles, she had nothing to think of. Her mind was a virgin soil, ripe to receive the new seed that fell upon it—the seed of grand thoughts and of melodious verses full of deep meaning. To few other young women of nineteen could Shakespeare and Byron mean so much as they meant to this girl. She knew no bright visions outside those books. Her only knowledge of

nature was derived from Regent's-park and Primrose-hill, and rare had been her glimpses even of those unremote landscapes. She had spent a summer afternoon once on Hampstead-heath on the occasion of a school-treat; but that blissful day was long gone by, and the rural scene had faded from her memory behind the mist of years. Yet, by that normal clairvoyance of the imagination which Lord Lytton has described in one of his exquisite essays, she beheld the snow-clad mountains where Manfred held commune with the spirit-world, the old Italian garden where Romeo and Juliet wooed each other in the starlight.

By some gradual process, which he perhaps could hardly have explained to himself, the painter extended his hours of work in Voysey-street. There were days when he was not in the vein for the Lamia picture, and a young man with three thousand a year in perpetuity will hardly labour against the grain, having no need to produce pot-boilers. So on these off-days he would put his patient model into some new attitude, and begin a single-figure picture—Imogen, or Olivia, or Juliet, or the Dorothea of Cervantes, or Joan of Arc, as caprice prompted, the model caring nothing, so long as she had his company.

It is possible that Mrs. Gurner would have hardly tolerated so much waste of her granddaughter's time but for those social luncheons, which served the two women for dinners, and also on account of the more substantial aid afforded the small household by Mr. Leyburne's employment of Jarred as a picture-restorer.

"He's the best customer I've got," said Jarred to

his parent; "so mind you're civil to him, old lady. I'm not sorry he's taken so to Loo, for she's improved ever so much since she began to sit to him. Keeps her hair tidier, and mends her gown. And after all—though he might be sweet upon the other one to begin with—who knows what may happen? Men's minds are changeable enough at the best of times, or there wouldn't be so many breach-of-promise cases in the newspapers."

"Perhaps not, Jarred," sighed Mrs. Gurner; "but the breachers—I mean those who break their promise—generally throw over a poor girl to marry a rich one. 'Shortly after writing these beautiful letters, full of affection and quotations from Scripture, the defendant married another lady with property.' That's how it goes in the newspapers. There's generally property with the second lady. I never saw a case where it was a rich girl left in the lurch for the sake of a poor one."

"Because rich girls don't demean themselves by bringing actions," answered Jarred; "they've got the knowledge of their independence to sustain them, and they're above the consideration of damages."

"It may be so, Jarred; but experience has taught me to look at the dark side of the picture. I wouldn't allow Mr. Leyburne to come near the place if I thought there was any harm in him; but from what I've seen of him the babe unborn isn't more innocent."

Influenced, it may be, by some airy vision shaped out of possibilities, Mr. Gurner's soul expanded so far as to move him to give his daughter a sovereign for the purchase of a new gown.

"Never mind your grandmother's rubbish," he said,

when Loo told him of Mrs. Gurner's unwillingness to "tamper with the stock." "Go out and buy some new stuff that hasn't been worn by a pack of—Lord-knows-whats," said Mr. Gurner, pulling himself up short and coining a word, "but that's clean and decent as it came from the loom."

Whereupon Louisa, enraptured, rushed off to Peter Robinson's, where she was almost overcome by the size and splendour of the place, and bought a vivid blue merino, which she cut out and half made that evening, under the indignant eyes of her grandparent.

"If you had money to spend, Louisa, I think you might have laid it out in your own family. I'd have let you had that brown poplin for a sovereign—a dress that must have cost five when it was new."

"You said you didn't want to interfere with the stock, grandma."

"Not without having some *quo pro quid* to enter in my books, Louisa; but your custom would be the same as any one else's, except that I should have given you the advantage. I've been asking five-and-thirty shillings for that poplin."

"There's wine stains all down the front-breadth, grandma, and some little holes burnt in one sleeve, as if it was done with a cigar."

"You needn't disparage the dress, Louisa, because you've spent your money elsewhere."

"Besides, father told me to buy a new gown, and that's the long and the short of it," concluded Loo curtly.

The study of Shakespeare had not as yet improved or modified the familiar language of daily life.

"Perhaps, as your father is in such a generous mood, he'll be kind enough to pay the water-rate," observed Mrs. Gurner in a biting tone; "it's been standing long enough."

Mr. Leyburne was somewhat startled on his next visit by Loo's appearance in the bright blue gown. Its colour reminded him of that blue silk whose musical *frou-frou* he had heard so often in Fitzroy-square. He gave a little guilty look, and began painting with less delay than usual.

Louisa was disappointed. She had expected some praise of her new dress; not that it was his habit to pay her compliments, only a new dress was to her so great an event that she could hardly suppose it would pass unnoticed. She placed herself in the accustomed pose, but her lower lip trembled for a moment, and she looked like a child inclined to cry.

Walter dashed into his work vigorously, but soon flagged; seemed strangely disturbed in temper, and at last flung down his brush with a muttered exclamation that might have been anything.

"It's no use," he cried impatiently; "I can't paint you in that glaring blue thing. The flesh tints are nowhere. I must have a dress made immediately—classic drapery, and so on. I can get one from a theatrical costumier."

"Don't you like blue?" faltered Louisa.

"For some complexions. Not for yours. What made you put that gown on to-day?"

"It's a new one; my father gave it me. I thought you'd like it better than that old dingy one I always wear. I haven't had a new one for two years."

A little choking sound followed the confession,

and poor Loo's mortification found relief in tears. That beautiful bright blue garment which she had toiled to make in the dead hours of the night, when there was profoundest silence, save of errant cats, in Voysey-street; that garment over whose gores, and side-breadths, and placket-hole, and right sleeve and left sleeve, her puzzled brain had perplexed itself, was flouted as a "glaring blue thing" by the one person whose approbation she most desired. She had fancied that she would appear to him a regenerate creature in that new gown, like a butterfly released from the dull cocoon that had bound it.

The childish sob, the brimming eyes, touched Walter's kindly heart. He ran across the room to her, comforted her with little tender, meaningless words, and drew her towards him with a gentle brotherly caress.

"My dearest child," he said, "the dress is all that is charming as a dress. Only it kills your complexion. That pale olive skin of yours is ruined by blue reflections. Why didn't you tell me you wanted a new dress? Let me choose it for you. But I'll have the Lamia costume made at once. I must paint my drapery from the real thing—Greek robes of white cashmere, with the old key border in scarlet; just enough colour to warm the dead white, and make a vivid contrast with that inky hair."

She was consoled, but he remained none the less sorry for having wounded her. What a foolish sensitive creature she was, in spite of Voysey-street, the grandmother, the second-hand finery! A very woman, in no wise unsexed by that sharp ordeal of poverty. Until now he had shrunk from offering her anything

approaching to a gift. Even his books he had only lent her. But on the day after this little scene he sent her a parcel of silk, a deep rich purple red, the colour of Chambertin. There was lace in the parcel, soft-looking Brussels, or Mechlin, which Mrs. Gurner pronounced worth a small fortune. It was hardly the most serviceable dress that could have been given to a young person in Voysey-street, that wine-dark Naples silk, scarcely a dress to fetch beer in, or even wear sitting at one's ease in the little parlour, where all the domestic processes necessary to existence went on daily. Certainly not a dress in which to wait upon lodgers, or do the "cleaning." But, having wounded her by his unkindness, Mr. Leyburne was only eager to atone for his offence, and to his artistic mind the question of utility never presented itself.

"Dear Miss Gurner," he wrote in the brief note which accompanied the parcel, "I venture to send you a dress, which I think will suit you better than the blue. Kindly accept it, and wear it, as a proof that you have forgiven me my impertinence about the dress of your own choosing. I have ordered the Lamia costume, and shall be much obliged if you will go to Mercer's, in Bow-street, and have it tried on. I have told them you will call.—Yours always,

"WALTER LEYBURNE."

Mrs. Gurner turned over the contents of the parcel with many a moan.

"It must have cost ten shillings a yard," she said; "and there's fifteen yards, that's seven pound ten; and six yards of lace, at fifteen shillings to a pound—call

it fifteen—four pound ten; twelve pounds for a dress that you can never wear but once in a way on a Sunday afternoon; and then be dressed above your station and draw down evil-minded remarks. Twelve pound would have paid a quarter's rent. What a pity he didn't give you the money!"

"Do you suppose I'd have taken money from him, grandma?" flashed out Loo, wrapping up her parcel indignantly. "You don't know how to appreciate kindness and generosity. I don't care if I never wear the dress; but I'm proud to think he thought it was fit for me, and bought me such a dress as he'd have bought for a lady."

Jarred felt nothing but satisfaction at sight of the present.

"Bravo!" said he. "Hold up your head, my girl; there's money bid for you. Who knows what may happen? I should like to have a look at that doll-faced Miss in Fitzroy-square, and see if she's as good-looking as our Loo, now that she's taken to keep her hair tidy."

Instead of being grateful for the implied compliment, the girl flamed up at this speech of her father's.

"You've no business to say such things," she cried; "you've no right to talk about the young lady that—that—Mr. Leyburne's going to marry. It's all very well for him to be kind, and to make believe to think me a lady; and I'm grateful to him for taking so much trouble. But do you think I don't know that it's all make-believe? do you think I don't know that I'm like the dirt under his feet?"

"Bless and save us!" exclaimed Jarred, "what a



spitfire! Here, give me the tobacco-jar, Loo, and don't talk like a fool. The best horse will win, depend upon it; and it isn't likely I should back a strange stable, when I've got a filly of my own in the race."

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## CHAPTER IX.

"But life is sweet, and mortality blind ;  
And youth is hopeful, and Fate is kind  
In concealing the day of sorrow ;  
And enough is the present tense of toil—  
For this world is, to all, a stiffish soil ;  
And the mind flies back with a glad recoil  
From the debts not due till to-morrow."

RETURNING spring, the earliest chirp of blackbirds in the squares, the carol of a wandering lark that has strayed as far from dewy cornfields as St. John's Wood, a basket of primroses bawled in the dusty street, will awaken in most bosoms a sudden yearning for the country. London is all very well, be the square Grosvenor or Fitzroy, while we can draw our curtains, and light our gas, and call it luxury. London looming through the fog, with street-lamps gleaming redly, has a sort of gloomy picturesqueness, like that under-world through which Virgil cicerones Dante; but London when skies are blue, and the hawthorns abloom in Twickenham meadows, be it ever so dear to the darlings of fashion, is apt to pall upon that less-favoured race which hath no fellowship with the children of Belgravia, to whom the crowd in Hyde Park at sundown is "but a gallery of pictures." Thus, perhaps, arose in Flora Chamney's breast a new desire for fairer scenes than are to be found within the four-mile radius. A dinner at Richmond, to which Dr. Ollivant and Mr.

Leyburne were both invited, served to sharpen this hunger rather than to appease it.

"It's so nice of you to bring us down here, papa darling," she said in her fond way, as they sauntered along the walk that leads to Thomson's favourite seat, and Earl Russell's rustic cottage, while the marmitons of the Star and Garter stewed eels and larded sweet-breads for their delectation; "but it only makes me long all the more for the real country. This path and that landscape are ever so beautiful; but I think I can feel London in the air. My eyes are not so sharp as Henry the Eighth's when he stood on that little knoll yonder, and watched for the hoisting of the standard that was to tell him poor dear Anne Boleyn's head was cut off—that's historical fact, isn't it, Dr. Ollivant? I remember reading it at Miss Mayduke's. But my sense of smell seems to tell me London is very near."

"I should think, if you smelt anything, it would be the dinners cooking at the Star and Garter," said Dr. Ollivant.

"Come now, papa, when are we to go to the real country?"

"I suppose that means Brighton or Scarborough," said the doctor.

"It means nothing of the kind. It means some wild lonely place, where papa and I could wander about as we pleased, dressed anyhow, and where I should never feel ashamed of that old Panama hat papa was so fond of wearing last summer. A place where our friends could come to see us if they pleased, and where there would be the sea and boats, and where I could sketch from nature all day long, if I

liked. There must be ever so many such places at home and abroad; abroad would be best, for I do so long to see some strange new world, where the common people look like peasants on the stage, and where there is a background of blue mountains, and vineyards, and broad winding river, such as one sees in a drop-scene. Now, dear Dr. Ollivant, please take my part. You know you told papa travelling would be good for him."

"Did I?" asked the doctor absently. "I forget."

"Do you really? How strange! Why, it was your own suggestion, one evening in Wimpole-street; the very first evening we ever spent there."

"I may have said so. But travelling on the Continent is hardly the kind of thing I should recommend to your father just now. He wants repose." The grave professional look travelled slowly to the figure beside him. "An English watering-place might be beneficial, if he liked the idea."

"I like any idea that my little girl likes," said Mark Chamney. "If she has set her heart on the Continent, we'll go on the Continent."

"No, no, papa," cried Flora hurriedly, and with a sudden subdued look in her face, as of one to whose mind some grave sad question had newly presented itself; "no, we will only go where it is best for you. Advise us, Dr. Ollivant. Would it be best to stay at home—would the fatigue of a journey hurt papa?"

"I believe not. Indeed, I think change of air and scene would be good for him."

"Then I will go anywhere you please, papa," said the girl, more fondly than ever, with anxious eyes lifted sadly to her father's face and one little hand

clinging to his arm. A pretty picture of purest womanhood, and grace more sweet than beauty, yet one that escaped the painter's errant gaze. He was looking across the landscape, dreamily, into the dim blue distance beyond the winding river.

"In that case we'll go to Branscomb. It's the only English watering-place I know or care about. You must remember Branscomb, Ollivant; the place we used to go to when we were boys."

"I have a faint recollection of spending a day there once, and of universal dreariness."

"Dreariness! with the sea at your feet? Why, man, there is an everlasting beauty in that which is independent of all the petty prettiness of the land. Set me face to face with the sea, and I don't care what barren rock or parched and sandy waste you give me to stand upon. But if Branscomb is rather a dull, out-of-the-way place, the country round is beautiful. I doated upon Branscomb when I was a boy; perhaps the happiest hours of my life were the long sunny days I spent lying on the beach or shying pebbles at the seagulls."

"Pray let us go to Branscomb, papa. I shall love to see the place you were so fond of," cried Flora, brightening with her father's eagerness. He could hardly be so very ill as she had feared just now from that strange grave look of the doctor's, for he spoke as if there were still pleasures worth living for—as if the warmth and gladness of life were still aglow in his breast. "You'll come to see us at Branscomb, won't you, Mr. Leyburne?" she said in a gayer tone to the painter. "I don't think you'd be deterred by a long journey."

She thought that in those hansom cabs of his, the sound of whose swift wheels and banging of whose doors so often startled her, he must every week travel the distance between London and Edinburgh.

"I beg your pardon," said Walter, newly awakened from his reverie. "Who's Branscomb?"

Everything had to be explained to him. He had evidently heard nothing of the conversation for the last quarter of an hour.

"You must come to see us in Devonshire, and teach me to paint the sea. I shall be sketching nearly all day long."

He would be delighted, of course, not that the sea was in his line, but he would give her such help as he could, directly he had finished a picture he had in hand.

This was early in May. Mr. Chamney and his daughter had not yet been to the Royal Academy.

"I thought your important picture was to be finished and sent in last month," said Flora.

"No. I did think of sending it in this year; but I have been lazy. The picture is only half-finished. I didn't want to scamp it, you see, and I couldn't get a model I liked for one of my figures."

"I'm so sorry. I was looking forward to seeing your picture at the Exhibition. Then there is nothing of yours, I suppose," she concluded regretfully.

"Yes. I sent a trifle by way of an experiment; and for a wonder it was accepted. Skyed, of course, but it is something to get in."

"O, please tell me all about it."

"There is so little to tell. It is only a single figure.

You might go through the rooms half a dozen times without noticing it."

"*I* couldn't," said Flora naïvely; "I should know your style. But do tell me the subject."

"I call it '*Esmeralda*'—Victor Hugo's heroine, you know. A solitary figure crouching against the dark wall of a mediæval prison. A pale despairing face looking out of dense shadow."

"It must be grand," said Flora, enraptured.

"Only to the friendliest eyes. One of the weekly papers said my flesh-tints suggested putty, and my shadows were a reminiscence of pea-soup."

"Wretch!" cried Flora; "envy, of course. Why do they allow disappointed painters to turn critics?"

"It isn't fair, is it? Though, for that matter, I should like to walk into some of the exhibitors myself."

Everything was decided by and by, after dinner. They dined in the old coffee-room of the old Star and Garter, which most of us remember so well, and in which so many of us have dined in days that are gone and with friends that are dead. They dined in the broad bay window overlooking that fair valley through which Thames winds his silver ribbon; now making a gentle bend around the classic groves of Ham; now dividing his watery arms to embrace the willow-wooded islet. In this old window they sat while the twilight deepened, planning the Branscomb expedition; Mark Chamney full of talk, Flora animated and happy, Dr. Ollivant more cheerful than usual, only the painter thoughtful, leaning across his folded arms, with those dreamy eyes of his fixed on the fading landscape. Flora stole a glance at him now and

then, and wondered at his unwonted silence. But then, she reasoned, it is in the nature of artists to be thoughtful when face to face with nature. Even that familiar landscape, which every cockney knows by heart, but which of its kind is matchless, might mean inspiration for him.

"I think I'll come with you," said the doctor, "if you've no objection. I haven't had a holiday since I came from the Continent, except to run across the Channel to hear a lecture, or see an experiment now and then in Paris, and you can hardly call that recreation. I shouldn't wonder if I want a little of that complete repose I am always recommending to my patients."

"O, do come, Dr. Ollivant!" exclaimed Flora, delighted. "I never thought of asking you, knowing how precious your time is. But it would be so nice to feel you were taking care of papa. Not that he really needs much care, except mine, I hope," with an anxious half-appealing look, as much as to say, "For pity's sake, tell me that all is well."

"No, Baby, I couldn't have a tenderer nurse than you," answered the father, drawing the slight figure nearer to him in the friendly twilight. "And so long as I live your care shall make me happy. Only remember, darling, the best-made machinery will wear out sooner or later, and perhaps some of the strongest may break down all at once, like that wonderful one-horse chaise we were reading about the other night."

"Papa, papa!" with a burst of tears, "how can you speak lightly of what would break my heart!"

"Why, Baby! as if I were an oracle, and knew all



the ins and outs of destiny. Come, Flo, cheer up, and let us talk about Branscomb. I'll telegraph to a house-agent at Long Sutton to-morrow morning, and tell him to go over and find us lodgings, or a house, and we'll go down the next day. You'll go with us, won't you, Walter? My little girl must have gayer society than two old fogies like Ollivant and me."

The doctor laughed, that low but somewhat bitter laugh of his, so subdued as hardly to have offended Lord Chesterfield.

"One of the penalties which Science inflicts on her votaries," said he, "to be set down as an old fogy at eight-and-thirty."

"You are very kind," answered Walter, coming suddenly to life again, as if out of a mesmeric trance; "but I don't think I could leave London at so short a notice, even for the pleasure of accompanying you and Miss Chamney; and I need hardly say what a temptation that is. I've so much work in hand."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Chamney, "as if a young fellow in your position need care about work."

"It's foolish, perhaps, but I've set my heart on making some shred of reputation. If you'll allow me to follow you in a week or so, I shall be very glad."

"As you please," said Mr. Chamney, piqued; and so the matter ended.

It seemed strange to Flora that there should be any hitch in her programme. She had been accustomed to find the painter a willing slave, not that she had tried him by any means severely, for the ways and works of coquetry were unknown to her simple soul. But until lately he had hung upon her words as if they were of supreme importance to him, and

had been studiously attentive to her slightest wishes. Of late, within the last few weeks at least, there had been a change too subtle for her to understand, far too indefinite for her to complain of, even in her own thoughts, but just sufficient to steal a little of life's sunshine from that lot which had seemed to her so perfect in its full measure of happiness.

"I thought I was almost the happiest creature in this world," she said to herself; "but then I counted him as a part of my happiness. If we should have been mistaken after all, papa and I, and he doesn't care for me—never did care for me any more than for any other girl in whose father's house he might like to spend his evenings!"

The mere suggestion was appalling. How foolish she had been to think of him as she had thought, to reckon his love in the sum total of her happiness! It was her father's fault, no doubt, or the effect of that pleasant easy-going friendship between these two young people—drawing-lessons, delicious dabbings with the brightest colours Rathbone-place could furnish, duet-singing, voices blending in dulcet harmonies, a similarity of tastes that seemed to mark them as those twin-born beings parted in some ante-natal phase of existence, and only perfect when reunited. She had taken it for granted, ever so long ago, that he loved her, and that the shred of reputation he talked of with such proud humility was to be a crown of wild olive laid at her feet. Yet, chilled by this indescribable change in him, and brought face to face with stern reality, what foundation had she for the fabric of her dream-palace? Those thrilling smiles and looks of his, words and whispers that had sunk into

her inmost heart, the fond clasp of his hand at parting, the lingering talk on the half-lighted staircase when he was going away—these might mean nothing after all, might only be the small-change current in that society of which she knew so little, mere counters, made for show, and worthless as withered leaves.

“If he doesn’t come to Branscomb I shall know he doesn’t care for me,” thought Flora, as they drove back to London in the clear spring night.

They had not gone far before the painter threw off his thoughtfulness like a garment, and began to talk with his accustomed gaiety. He was, indeed, gayer than usual, with a vivacity that bordered on boisterousness; and Flora’s doubts and fears vanished like “snow-flakes in the river.”

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## CHAPTER X.

"You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave.  
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire."

It was not quite ten o'clock when they arrived in Fitzroy-square, so Mr. Chamney insisted upon taking both his friends up to the drawing-room for the doch-an-dorrach, or parting cup, which in this instance took the shape of brandy-and-seltzer. He was tired, and flung himself at full length on a capacious old sofa; but was not too tired to ask for one of his favourite songs.

"Give us the 'Land of the Leal,' Flo," he said; and Flora went to the piano obediently, and began those pathetic words of Caroline Nairne's. But half-way in the second verse she broke down suddenly and burst into tears.

Walter was by her side in a moment, bending over her tenderly, asking if she were ill or tired. Her father looked round wonderingly.

"Why, Baby, what's the matter?"

She took no notice of the painter's solicitude, but left the piano and knelt down by her father's sofa, and put her arms round his neck.

"Forgive me for being so foolish, darling," she said, in lowest tones, meant for his ear alone; "but I can't bear any song that speaks of parting. You

won't leave me, will you, dear? You'll take care of yourself, and get strong and well, and never leave me?"

He took her to his heart and kissed her fondly.

"May God be merciful to us, my dearest, and lengthen our days together!" he said gently; "I will do nothing to shorten them. And now go up-stairs, dear; you're tired and a little out of spirits. Yet you were so gay coming home from Richmond."

"Yes, papa; I forget sometimes. But that song put a sudden fear into my heart. Very foolish, wasn't it? A song about a poor old man, who was between seventy and eighty, I daresay. As if that had anything to do with you, who are in the prime of life."

"It was very foolish, Baby! and you've fairly earned your pet name. Now, wish our friends good-night, and go up-stairs to bed, dear; I'm sure you're tired."

The two gentlemen, who had been discreetly pre-occupied during this little dialogue,—one in looking at the slumbering canaries, the other turning over the leaves of a music-book,—now emerged from their abstraction and bade Flora good-night, each after his peculiar fashion—Mr. Leyburne with a lingering tenderness, which had yet something doubtful and undecided about it, as if he could hardly trust the blind impulse of his heart; the doctor with thoughtful gravity, detaining the little hand for a moment while he put his finger on the slender wrist.

"A shade too quick," he said; "but a night's rest will set you up again. Change of air will be very good for you as well as for papa."

The doctor left immediately, and Walter went out

with him. The square would have been empty of human life but for one solitary figure standing by the railings, looking up at Mr. Chamney's house. Dr. Ollivant stopped to look across the road at this lonely wayfarer.

"Curious," he said; "she looks as if she were watching Chamney's house."

She moved away as he spoke, and walked towards the other side of the square.

"'One more unfortunate,' I suppose," said the doctor with a sigh; "but she really did seem to be watching the house when we came out, didn't she?"

"Upon my word, I didn't see her," answered Walter hurriedly.

"Then you must have been looking up at the stars, for she was standing exactly opposite. Good-night."

"Good-night."

They were at the door of Mr. Leyburne's abode by this time, and here parted with no remarkable warmth of feeling. Walter put his latch-key in the lock, but lingered a little over the operation—long enough to allow the doctor's upright figure to vanish from the square—and then put the key back into his pocket and hurried off in the direction taken by the girl. She had not left the square. He found her standing by the railings on the other side, her face almost hidden by a thick black veil tied tightly across it. He knew her, however, in spite of this disguise.

"Loo!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here, child?"

"I don't know—nothing! I was miserable at home, so I came out for a walk. One may as well be miser-

able out of doors as in that stuffy room with grandma. I knew very well where you'd be, so I went to look up at the windows—for company."

"Poor Loo!" with infinite compassion. "Why, the books I lent you would have been better company than that!"

"Yes, if I could only read them. But I can't—at least not till grandma's gone to bed. It's a crime to open a book in her opinion. I sit up till three in the morning sometimes reading, though. I think I know the *Bride of Abydos* by heart. But even then I get bullied about the candle being burnt out."

"I wouldn't say bullied, Loo. It's out of harmony with feminine lips."

"Pitched into, then."

"Worse and worse. Isn't it just as easy to say scolded?"

"I daresay it is; but it does me more good to say bullied. I do get bullied, nagged at and bullied from morning till night. Is it my fault if things are dearer than they used to be, and taxes higher? I'm sure I'm treated as if it was."

The old leaven would show itself sometimes in this poor Louisa, despite of the refining influence which had wrought so swift a change. Her mood to-night was not the softest. She knew that she was sinking back into the old lowness, for which she had hated herself and her surroundings even to loathing; but there was a sullen anger in her heart just now which made her indifferent to her own degradation. What did these small distinctions of language signify? She could never be a lady. In the good old days of the slave-trade it mattered very little to one of that

subject race what shade of blackness his visage wore. There were no degrees of bondage. Under that hateful law every colour counted as black. So with Louisa's slavery to the bondmaster Poverty. Of what use were her dim aspirations for refinement when she knew herself without the pale?

"What's the good of telling me not to use vulgar words?" she asked sullenly; "I should never be like *her*;" with a jerk of her head in the direction of Mr. Chamney's abode.

"You might be a very superior young woman for all that," replied the painter, not disputing her proposition; "you've brains enough for anything. Come, Loo, I'll tell you a secret. We'd better walk towards Voysey-street, though; it doesn't look well standing about here."

"As if looks mattered for such as me."

"Your favourite Byron would have said 'such as I'—am understood. I don't know what's amiss with you to-night, Loo; you're not like yourself."

"Yes, I am; more like myself than I've been for a long time. I've been trying hard to be like some one else. Not *her*!" with another jerk; "for of course *that's* impossible. Such as me—I—can't be like perfection. You might as soon wash negroes white—real negroes, not Christy's. I did try to grow a little better, though; but to-night I had a fit of unhappiness—or wickedness—I don't know which, for in me they seem almost the same thing—and I came out of doors to get out of myself if I could."

"Poor Loo!" murmured Walter, in the same compassionate tone, as gently as if he had been trying to comfort a fretful child. "Poor foolish, impatient



Loo! Come, now, it's time I told you my grand secret."

"That you're going to be married soon, I suppose?" she said. There are women who—in such moods as this woman was now in—take a savage pleasure in saying things that hurt them.

"Nothing of the kind. I—well—to tell you the truth, I've been a little unsettled in my ideas of matrimony lately. Yet Flora is the sweetest girl in the world. To deny that would be a kind of treason. Only you see a man has to discover whether a particular kind of sweetness suits his particular temper, and to be very sure that the honey never could cloy. Some men even like their honey with a dash of vinegar in it. In short, I have a disagreeable knack of not knowing my own mind."

All this was said with as much freedom and frankness as if he had been talking to a young man instead of to a young woman.

"What is your grand secret, then, if it isn't that?" asked Loo, still in a sullen tone.

"Why, it's about you, my dear Louisa. Ever so long ago, very soon after I began the 'Lamia,' I determined to make you some little recompense for your kindness in sitting to me."

"My kindness!" echoed the girl scornfully. "As if it wasn't pleasanter to me to sit and hear poetry than to scrub floors or run errands."

"I'm glad it wasn't unpleasant; but still it was a kindness to me all the same. I made up my mind I'd do something; and when I found out what a clever girl you are, I said to myself, the something shall take the form of education. If the picture succeeds—it

was a fancy of mine to make it contingent on the success of the picture—I'll send Loo to the best boarding-school I can find, for three years; at the end of which time she'll be a well-educated young lady, and able to get her own living in a lady-like manner. Young women are not at a discount as they used to be; there are telegraph-offices and houses of business, and goodness knows what, open to the weaker sex nowadays. Well, the picture hasn't succeeded yet; in point of fact, it has not been sent in. But the 'Esmeralda' for which you sat is the first picture I've ever had hung, and it's been well spoken of in half a dozen newspapers. So you see you've been lucky to me after all, Loo."

"I'm glad of that," she said in a softer tone.

"Therefore, as delays are dangerous, I've resolved to finish the pictures you're sitting for as fast as I can, and make immediate arrangements for sending you to school."

To his surprise and consternation the girl shook her head resolutely.

"I won't go to school," she said; "it's very good of you to think of it, and I'm grateful. But I don't want schooling. You couldn't school me into a lady; and as for being a governess, I couldn't sit quiet to teach children grammar and geography if it was my only chance of escaping starvation. I'm pretty quick at figures, and I could learn anything I should want to know for a house of business in a quarter's evening school—at Mr. Primrose's in Cave-square. I think, though, I'd rather emigrate when you've done your pictures. I had an aunt that went to Australia, and

I've sometimes thought of getting away from Voysey-street and grandma's worrying by going off like her."

Walter Leyburne shuddered. Here was a strong-minded young woman for whom he could do nothing—a young woman who could calmly contemplate a solitary voyage to the Antipodes.

"I can't tell you how you've disappointed me," he said. "Do think it over quietly, and try to see the question in a different light. Consider all the advantages of education."

"What could it do for me except raise me above my station?" asked Loo moodily; "and make me hate Voysey-street just a shade more than I do now. It wouldn't give me a new father—not but what I'm fond of him as he is—or a new grandmother. It wouldn't make me more on a level with your perfect young lady in Fitzroy-square."

"How you harp upon her, child! Why, education would raise you to her level! It is only education that constitutes her present superiority. Her sweetness is the sweetness of a refined nature which has never been degraded by vulgar associations."

"But my nature has been so degraded," replied Loo quickly. "You couldn't wash the vulgarity out. Laying English grammar and French, and music and drawing, and the use of the globes, over the degradation wouldn't be much use. It would be like father's varnishing a bad picture—the picture may look a little better, but the bad drawing and the false colour are there all the same."

"You talk like a philosopher," said the painter, somewhat offended that his benevolent instincts should

be thus thwarted; "and I bow to your superior judgment. I will say no more."

"Now you're angry with me," cried Louisa, quick to hear the change in his tone; "but indeed I'm not ungrateful. I should be so, if I let you waste your money in trying to do something that can't be done. As for education," she went on with a sardonic laugh, "rely upon it that's a luxury thrown away upon people of our class. I can just read and write and cast up a bill for grandma, and hold my own against the milkman when he wants us to pay for ha'porths we haven't had. That's enough for me. I don't suppose I could be fonder of Shakespeare and Byron than I am, if I'd had ever so good an education."

"Perhaps not; but you'd have a more critical appreciation of both."

"That means that I should find out their faults. Then I don't want to be critical."

"What a tiresome obstinate girl you are!"

"O, you can't lift me out of the mire; I was born in it. You've changed my life for a little time, and brightened it; but when the pictures are done, good-bye to the brightness. You'll have done with me."

"Done with you! Now, Loo, is it kind to talk like that, when I want to be your true and loyal friend—as true to you as if we had been born brother and sister? The misfortune is, that the abominable laws of society—made, of course, to restrain miscreants—give so narrow a scope for friendship between a man of my age and a girl of yours. If you won't let me send you to school, I don't know that there's a single thing I can do for you to prove my friendship. I give

you my honour I was thinking about this very subject at Richmond this afternoon."

"At Richmond!" exclaimed Loo. "You had been to Richmond with them, then? I saw you all get out of the carriage."

"Foolish girl, to waste your time watching other people."

"Richmond! that's a pretty place, isn't it?"

"Rather," replied the young lord of the universe, secure in the possession of an income that would allow him to range the world, from one garden of enchantment to another, and not disposed to be rapturous about a London suburb. "Yes, it's a niceish place. Haven't you been there?"

"I've never been anywhere, except to Hampstead Heath once, and to the Forest."

"What forest?"

"Epping. Are there any other forests?"

"Any other forests! Poor child! To think that this world is so beautiful, and you have hardly seen anything outside Voysey-street. Let the usages of society go hang! I'm not a ruffian, and I won't be fettered by them. Do you think your grandmother would let me take you for a day in the country, Loo? I could get a dog-cart from the livery-stables, and I'd drive you down to some nice little village by the Thames—Shepperton or Halliford, or some such place. I'd ask the old lady to go with us; only I'm afraid she'd be rather a damper."

"She would," said Loo candidly. "She always is a damper."

"Do you think she'd let us go?"

"I don't know. Perhaps if you asked her she might."

"Then I'll propose it to her to-morrow, after we've had a snack of some kind and a bottle or two of Edinburgh. Would you like to see the hawthorn hedges, and the river, and the reedy little islands, eh, Loo?"

"Would I like! What have I ever seen of the country, or of anything that's bright and pretty? It would seem like being in heaven. I always think the great beauty of heaven must be that it isn't like Voysey-street."

They were in the much-abused Voysey-street by this time, and encountered two or three slip-shod specimens of the genus girl, fetching supper-beer. The chandler's shop was only just shutting; it was the noon of night at the shell-fish merchant's. They parted at the door of the ladies' wardrobe, Walter pledging himself to obtain Mrs. Gurner's permission for that holiday beside the winding Thames.

"You haven't any idea how jolly the river is, when you get high up towards Windsor, above the locks," he said; and then bade Loo a kindly good-night. The promised pleasure had restored her spirits. Her eyes—those dark inscrutable eyes—had brightened; her whole aspect improved. Yet at the last she flung a random shot.

"What will Miss Chamney say if you take *me* out?" she said.

"It cannot make the slightest difference to Miss Chamney," he answered stiffly. "Good-night."

The lifted hat, that dignified farewell, sent a chill to Loo's impatient heart.

"What's the good of my wearing myself into a fever about him?" she said to herself, as she went

through the dark little shop, into the airless parlour, with a tolerable certainty of being "nagged at" for her untimely absence. "What am I to him, or he to me? There's nothing in nature farther apart. His kindness to me is only charity. I almost hate him for it."

Yet she did not hate the idea of that day in the country, but yearned for it with a longing that was akin to pain. To be with him for a whole day, away from all the sights and sounds of Voysey-street—from the dirty room reeking with stale tobacco, the slatternly grandmother in her greasy black-silk gown, the sordid misery of her daily life; to escape from these things but for a few hours, and to be with him! Was it any wonder that she sickened at the thought of disappointment?

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## CHAPTER XI.

"'Twas one of the charmèd days  
When the genius of God doth flow—  
The wind may alter twenty ways,  
A tempest cannot blow :  
It may blow north, it still is warm ;  
Or south, it still is clear ;  
Or east, it smells like a clover farm ;  
Or west, no thunder fear."

MRS. GURNER, conciliated by a Melton Mowbray veal-and-ham pie, washed down with copious draughts of Edinburgh ale, proved more tractable than might have been expected. She did not forget that dignity which was the strong rock of her life. She dilated upon the impropriety of a young gentleman giving a young lady a day's outing, unless those two young people were specifically understood by their circle of friends or acquaintance to be "keeping company." She had seen enough of good manners, before her misfortunes reduced her from the sphere in which she had been born and brought up, to be fully instructed upon this point. People who were keeping company might go where they liked; people who were not keeping company must defer to the prejudices of a too censorious world.

Walter reddened a little at these remarks, while Loo frowned and bit her nether lip, and tried to tread upon her grandmother's foot under the table.

"Never mind the censorious world, Mrs. Gurner. I hope you know that I'm not a scoundrel."



"I have always found you, in every respect, the gentleman," said the old lady, pouring out a final tumbler of Younger's Edinburgh.

"Then you may feel sure that your granddaughter will be safe in my care. I only want to give her a few hours' fresh air. See how white she looks."

"I feel the want of fresh air myself," said the elder lady, with a faint groan; "but no one troubles themselves about *my* looks."

Walter felt uncomfortable.

"I'm sure, my dear Mrs. Gurner, if you'd like to go with us—" he began, making a desperate offer. It would be fearful to have that old woman beside him in the dog-cart: and he could hardly put her on the back seat, with the possibility of her being jolted off and flattened upon the pavement. He wanted to be alone with Loo. He wanted a long sunny day in rural lanes, sheltered by elder and hawthorn, beside the winding river. He wanted to talk of Shakespeare and Keats and Byron, pictures, his hopes, his future—all those subjects which this poor uneducated Loo seemed to understand even better than Flora Chamney.

Happily Mrs. Gurner had mercy on him.

"No," she said, "two's company. I should only be an encumbrance. Besides, I've had so little fresh air of late years that it might turn me giddy. Let her go; let her enjoy herself; youth's the time for happiness." This with a dismal sigh.

The consent was yielded, however, and that was all Mr. Leyburne cared about.

"If it's a fine day to-morrow I shall call for you at eleven o'clock," said Walter.

Loo tried not to look quite as delighted as she was. After all, she kept saying to herself, his kindness was only pity.

Walter went away curiously pleased at having gained his point. The idea of to-morrow's holiday elated him. He was surprised at his own gladness.

"There's something so fresh and original about her," he thought. "I suppose that's why I like her society so much. Or is it because I ought not to be so fond of her company? ought not to have a thought for any one except that dear little Flora, who seems to have been created on purpose for me? I wonder how it was Eve listened to the serpent. Was it out of sheer perversity, or because Adam was rather a dull companion?"

The next day was glorious, balmy, midsummer-like; a day which raised Walter Leyburne's spirits to their most joyous point. The ostler from the livery-stables had the dog-cart ready for him when he went into the yard. He had been artful enough to go to the yard for that vehicle, rather than have it brought to his door in Fitzroy-square. He saw no actual wrong in what he was doing; but it seemed to him just as well that neither Mark nor Miss Chamney should know anything about this little excursion.

He drove briskly round to Voysey-street, astonishing the gutter children by the splendour of his appearance, in light-gray dust-coat and white hat. Loo was ready. She had put on her claret-coloured silk, his own gift, to do him honour. A black-lace shawl, the loan of which Mrs. Gurner had on this occasion conceded, draped her sloping shoulders, a little black-

lace bonnet, ingeniously constructed out of odds and ends, perched coquettishly upon her raven hair—hair which was plenteous enough to need no help from art—her father, who knew of the intended excursion, and expressed no disapproval, had given her three-and-sixpence for a new pair of gloves. The result was satisfactory, and Miss Gurner looked remarkably handsome—so handsome that Walter was almost startled.

"Why you look better than 'Lamia'!" he exclaimed; "and I thought I had you there at your best. There's more life, more colour. I suppose it's because you look so happy. Poor child, to think that the prospect of a drive in the country can give you so much pleasure!"

"It isn't that—it's the prospect of being with you," the girl answered, almost involuntarily.

Walter reddened a little—just as he had reddened yesterday when Mrs. Gurner made that awkward speech about keeping company; but he said never a word, and pretended to be rather busy with the horse for the next half-mile.

They left London by the Bayswater-road. For a long time villas and gardens, terraces, houses, detached and semi-detached, flashed by in endless succession; but when they had crossed Hammersmith-bridge they seemed to be in the country. Walter drove into Richmond Park by the Sheen gate, and across by the wildest, loneliest roads in that lovely park, 'to the Kingston gate; little bursts of rapture breaking from Loo's lips at every change in the picture—the scudding deer starting up from the young fern; the arching elms above the road; the plantations of pine and fir

and tender larch, where young gray rabbits flashed in and out among the undergrowth. These things were all as new to Louisa Gurner as life and the world were to that ivory statue of King Pygmalion's, which the indulgent goddess endowed with consciousness.

Walter drove slowly through the park. To the painter's eye, the vernal landscape was ever new and delightful, and he wanted to see what impression natural beauty would make upon Louisa. For a little while she spoke not a word, but gazed breathless, with parted lips, only expressing her pleasure by that occasional cry of delight; but words came at last.

"I don't so much wonder now," she said.

"You don't wonder at what?"

"Keats and Byron. It puzzled me so much to think where all their beautiful thoughts came from. But now I know the world is so lovely, it doesn't seem so strange there should be poets. A poet couldn't come out of Voysey-street."

"He would hardly be much of a singer if he had never been face to face with nature certainly. Yet there might be stuff for such a muse as Crabbe's, even in Voysey-street. And so you think the world lovely, do you, Loo? Yet Richmond Park is only a little bit of the world Byron knew."

"I feel as if I'd seen all that he saw," answered Loo. "When I read *Childe Harold* late at night, while grandma's asleep—not reading it as you'd read a novel, you know, but gloating over it—I seem to be standing by his side. If you were to ask me what Lake Lemman was like, or the mountains, or Rome, I couldn't tell you; but I feel as if I had it all in my

mind—the water, and the sky, and the warm sweet air, and everything standing out clear and vivid, like a picture.”

“The work of a strong imagination, Loo. Rather a dangerous gift,” said Walter, with the air of a sage.

“Is it? Well, sometimes I do fancy I was happier before I knew there were such people as poets. I used to feel miserable enough then, to be sure, but it was a dull quiet kind of misery; it didn’t hurt me so much. I could always sleep when I was tired, and forget my troubles. ‘I don’t think I ever dreamt, in those days. But now I feel restless, and there’s a fever in my mind sometimes, and I have such wishes and longings for a brighter life!’”

This speech, uttered with that reckless candour which was a characteristic of Loo’s, made Mr. Leyburne somewhat thoughtful.

“I’ll tell you what it is, Loo,” he began presently; “if you’d only let me carry out that idea of mine about your education, you might have as bright and happy a life as any girl need wish for. Just think how many doors education would open for you. You might get a situation as governess or companion in some family who were roving about the Continent, and then you would see Switzerland, and Italy, and all the ground Childe Harold travelled over. Do just consider.”

“I have considered, and I won’t be beholden to you,” answered Loo bluntly. “I don’t want to be educated; I don’t want to be made any better than I am. I should only feel my degradation more than I do now.”

“But, my dear girl, why harp upon what you

call your degradation? There's no degradation in poverty."

"Perhaps not. I daresay some people have the art of making poverty delightful. You read about such people in novels. But there is degradation in dirt, and we are dirty; not for want of scrubbing and cleaning, for I don't spare that; but because everything about us is old and dingy and grubby; the dirt seems to have got into the pores of the house; and then grandma is dirty—it grows upon her as she gets older. And there's degradation in fine words mispronounced and misapplied; and grandma does it. There's degradation in not being able to pay one's way; and we can't pay ours. There's degradation in telling stories about pictures; and father does it. You can't lift me out of all that; I'm steeped to the lips in it."

"Really, Loo, you are the most incorrigible girl!" exclaimed Walter, sorely vexed by this obstinacy in Miss Gurner.

He wanted to do her some real service, feeling that he had done her disservice by raising her ideas above the dull level of her most prosaic surroundings.

"What am I to do for you, Loo?" he cried.

"Let me alone. I don't want to be taught to despise father. You can give me a day's pleasure like this, once in a way, if you like. I can live the rest of my life looking forward to it."

Walter did not respond promptly to this suggestion. He had begun to think already that this day in the country—a scheme of purest benevolence, like the summer treats which the charitable provide for ragged-school children—was rather a foolish business. Loo, with all her abruptness and roughness, was a danger-

ously interesting young person to the artistic mind—all the more interesting, perhaps, because so unconventional. There must be no repetition of this country drive, if he wished to marry Flora Chamney.

But did he wish to marry Miss Chamney? Of course he did—dear sweet little Flora, who was so fond of him. He had found out that secret ever so long ago. Pretty little Flora, whose voice went so well with his own, whose little hand trembled sometimes when he touched it unawares. Innocent little Flora, who was struggling up the steep mountain of art, with a box of crayons, chalking *Gulnares* and ancient beggarmen *ad nauseam*. Could he help loving that dear little girl, especially when Mark Chamney's desire upon this subject was so obvious?

For ten minutes or even a quarter of an hour, Mr. Leyburne gave himself up to serious meditation. They were at Kingston by that time, driving through the gay little market-town, with its quaint gables and old-world air; then down by the Thames, and onward towards Thames Ditton and Moulsey. Loo was gazing around with wide admiring eyes. The solemn avenue yonder skirting the Palace grounds, the clear rippling water, the pretty villas, all bright with tulip-beds and hyacinth-boxes, and early roses on southern walls; the cottage-gardens full of wall-flowers breathing sweetest odours. A world of beauty verily, after Voysey-street.

"Come, Loo," said Mr. Leyburne, putting aside serious thought as a business that could stand over, "it's almost time we began to think of halting somewhere. I mean to give you a row, as well as a drive. I know a nice little inn at Thames Ditton where they'll give us a comfortable dinner; and while they're get-

ting it ready, I'll row you up to Hampton-Court-bridge, and we can land there and take a stroll in the Palace gardens; it's early yet, and there's no hurry."

"I wish the day could last for ever," said Loo, with a sigh; "everything is so lovely."

"The drive home will be still nicer, for we shall have moonlight."

"Yes, but it will be near the end then!"

They drove to the little inn—a quiet hostelry, almost unknown save to boating-men; here Walter delivered the horse to the care of a friendly ostler.

"You've taken it out of him pretty well, sir!" said the man.

"I've brought him down from London. I don't call that very much."

"No more it ain't, sir; but he looks rather the worst for it."

"Well, give him a pail of warm gruel, and make him as comfortable as you can. He won't be wanted till eight o'clock."

"All right, sir!"

Walter went in quest of a boat. There were several lying on the little hard just in front of the inn-garden. He picked the lightest and brightest-looking, and presently they were gliding over the clear water towards Hampton, between banks that were all rustic, rush-bordered, willow-shaded. And now they began to talk; Walter dipping the sculls lazily into the water, the boat making slowest progress against the stream.

How he talked! pouring out every thought and fancy as freely as if Loo were his second-self, his twin-born spirit, with a mind that nature had attuned to his—she seemed to understand him so thoroughly,



and all she said chimed in so well with his own thoughts.

What can surpass the delight of two minds thus in harmony? One long summer's day of careless talk, between such companions, is a memory to outlast all vulgar pleasures, and endure changeless through a lifetime. Walter Leyburne had never been happier than he was to-day, leaning forward with slow-dipping oars, reciting his dreams, his hopes, his desires to Louisa Gurner. They lingered on the river, careless of the flight of time; then landed and sauntered in the prim old-fashioned gardens, with their glorious vistas of blossoming chestnuts, their placid artificial waters, their famous basin of gold fish. Still the stream of talk flowed on, and time was forgotten.

"I wish I'd had a sister like you, Loo!" said Walter, as they stood side by side looking down at the smooth water in the Home Park on the other side of the iron rails. "I'd have made you a painter, if you'd been my sister, and we should have been such chums!"

"You can make your wife a painter when you're married!" answered Loo, with a faint touch of bitterness; "that pretty Miss Chamney you're engaged to—I've heard you say she paints very nicely."

"Yes, she has talent, but it will be a long time before it comes to anything that I should call painting, and she hasn't so bold a mind as yours, Loo: she's not such a companion to a man as you are. One must sing duets, or talk about the last book she has read, to get on with her; but you seem to understand and sympathise with me about everything; you follow my thoughts everywhere, even when you have to grope through the dark. When I talked to you about *Æschy-*

lus just now, I could see that you went with me into the dark hall where Agamemnon lay groaning in his bath. Flora would have only shuddered, and said 'How dreadful!'"

"But she has been well educated, and must know a great deal more than I do."

"She doesn't know a great deal of anything, but she knows a little of everything. She hasn't such deep thoughts as you have, Loo. Pray don't suppose that I mean to depreciate her; she is a dear little thing, and clever too in her feminine way; she's essentially feminine. If all women were like her, no one could ever have talked of the equality of the sexes. You might as well talk of equality between the oak and the primrose that grows at its foot, as talk of Flora's equality with a rough strong man."

"That sounds like high praise."

"Yes, she is a sweet little thing. But you make a mistake, Loo, when you talk of my being engaged to Miss Chamney. I am not actually engaged to her."

"Something very much like it though, I should think," answered Loo. "You talked as if it was a settled thing six months ago; and since then you've been always hanging about her, spending your evenings at her house."

"Except when I've spent them in Voysey-street."

"Except when you've dropped in to talk about pictures with father."

"And stopped to supper, and acquired a depraved appetite for liver-and-bacon, and sausages, and tripe," said Walter, laughing.

There was a cloud on Louisa's brow which he was anxious to disperse.

"Be sure of one thing, Loo," he said; "whether I marry Miss Chamney or whether I don't, I shall always be your true friend, and as anxious for your welfare as if you were my sister."

"It's all very well to promise that," answered Loo, with a sceptical air; "but you can't tell how Miss Chamney would like it, when she's your wife. She mightn't care about such friends as me."

"She would care for any one I cared for."

"That's as may be; she wouldn't care for any one out of Voysey-street; she wouldn't care for a person connected with second-hand clothes—it isn't likely. But don't let us talk of disagreeable things. Tell me something more about Skylous."

"Æschylus!" suggested Walter; and obeyed the damsel's bidding. It was much pleasanter to discourse upon the mighty trilogy than to discuss that doubtful and perplexing question of his future relations with Flora Chamney and Louisa Gurner. He wished to do his duty to both, and please everybody. Rather a difficult achievement.

With the help of Agamemnon and Orestes pleasantness soon returned to their discourse; and forgetful of possible damage to the dinner ordered at the Black Swan, they dawdled under the chestnuts and in the quaint old garden, with its reminiscences of jovial Charles and Dutch William.

Mr. Leyburne, having abandoned Orestes to the Furies, gave Loo a brief historical lecture, on the strength of their surroundings, and felt that there was no easier or more agreeable labour than to open the gates of knowledge to a sharp-witted and sensible young person.

"I tell you what it is, Loo," he said, "you're what the Italians call *sympatica*, and it's the easiest thing in the world to get on with you. When I think how little you know and how much you understand, I'm absolutely thunderstruck."

Loo blushed at his praise; and that bright youthful look which means happiness glowed in her face.

They were a long time strolling about the gardens, a long time going back to the boat, nor did Mr. Leyburne exert himself tremendously in the row back to the Swan. The sun was sloping westward as they landed on the little causeway below the inn-garden.

"Never mind the sun," said Walter, when Loo suggested that it was growing late; "we shall have the moon with us all the way home. The drive over Kingston Hill, on the old Portsmouth road, is splendid by moonlight."

All was very quiet at the Black Swan. The boating-men, who were the chief supporters of that riverside hostelry, were nowhere to be seen. Walter and Loo had the place all to themselves, as if they had been alone together in a world of their own. An elderly waiter exhibited an almost fatherly interest in their welfare, chid them gently for having occasioned the spoiling of an excellent dinner, and waited upon them with tender care.

Happily, neither Mr. Leyburne nor his companion cared very much whether the stewed eels were reduced to a pulpy condition, or the duckling roasted to rags. Walter had ordered a bottle of iced Moselle, which exhilarating beverage Louisa tasted for the first time. There was a gooseberry-tart with a jug of cream, which these young people preferred to the coarser

dishes that had gone before. Altogether the dinner was a success—to one of them at least a paradisiacal banquet. They lingered over it as they had lingered over every stage of that day of pleasure. The fatherly waiter brought them a pair of wax-candles, and the moon shone in through the now open casement of the rustic parlour, while they were still engaged with that delicious gooseberry-tart, happily unconscious that they had perchance been taking gooseberries in another form in their Moselle.

Even gooseberry-tart and cream must come to an end. The parental waiter cleared the table with that gentle dilatoriness which was the pervading charm of his manner, removing the glasses one by one, and toying fondly with the crumbs as he brushed them into his tray. Loo went to the window and looked out. The placid river ran rippling by under the moonlight—how different from that dismal Phlegethon she had seen sometimes from Waterloo-bridge!—the opposite shore had a dusky look against the clear dark azure of the sky; shadowy willows dipping in the stream, solemn poplars rising spire-like into the blue.

"I'm afraid it's ever so late," said Loo, in an alarmed tone, looking round at Walter, who sat with his elbows on the table, staring straight before him, curiously thoughtful; "how that Moselle makes one forget things! I never thought how the time was going."

"Why should you think about it?" asked Walter, waking from his reverie. "We are very happy, aren't we, Loo? What can anybody be more than happy? What can time matter to you and me?"

"But it does matter a good deal," answered Loo anxiously. "Grandma didn't say anything about the

time I was to be home, and I forgot to ask her how long I might stay. But I know she'd be very angry if I was late; and goodness knows how father might go on about it. He's dreadful when he's angry."

"He sha'n't be dreadful to you, Loo, if I'm by," said Walter, looking at his watch, but taking care not to enlighten Louisa as to the hour, which was later than he had supposed. "What time do your people go to bed?"

"All hours; sometimes eleven, sometimes twelve; sometimes ten, if father's cross. He generally goes to bed early if he's put out about anything."

"We shall be home before twelve, I daresay, Loo," answered Walter, trying to look unconcerned; he felt that he had been guilty in letting the time slip past. It hardly seemed a correct thing—even in a Bohemian state of society—to keep a young lady out till midnight.

"Before twelve!" exclaimed Loo, aghast. "But that's dreadfully late; father's sure to be angry."

"He shall not say a disagreeable word to you, Loo. I'll see him and explain everything."

"If he'll listen to you," said Loo, still frightened at the idea of parental wrath; "but he's so violent when he's in one of his tempers, and doesn't care for any one."

"I'll smooth him down, Loo, depend upon it. And now go and put on your things, while they get the trap round."

Loo ran away to put on her bonnet and shawl, and Walter gave the order for the immediate preparation of the dog-cart. It was past ten already, and there was little hope of his seeing Voysey-street till after twelve.

## CHAPTER XII.

"Love is no deity except when twin-born,  
Sprung from two hearts, each yearning unto each,  
Until they meet, though Hades yawn'd between them.  
Thou art to me the world's one man, and I,  
For good or ill, to thee the world's one woman."

HAVING given his order, Mr. Leyburne went out into the garden to smoke a parting cigar. His thoughts had been curiously unsettled that afternoon; the cigar might have a soothing influence, and enable him to arrange his ideas better.

The air of the garden was perfumed with lilacs, guelder roses gleamed whitely in the dusk of the shrubberied border, the plish-plash of the river had a soothing sound—altogether a nice place for meditation and tobacco.

How happy he had been that day! What freshness and life there had been in Loo's companionship! Never for a moment had their talk flagged, save in those thoughtful pauses when silence is sweeter than words—never had he felt himself misunderstood. This was indeed society.

What if he were to shut his eyes to Loo's wretched surroundings and secure this companionship to himself for ever—make this day only the image and type of many a day to come—a lifetime of such days? Alas, there were too many reasons against his taking such a step! First, it is an almost impossible thing to sever a

woman from her surroundings. To marry Loo would be to ally himself with grandma—grandma in her greasy gown; grandma whose breath hinted but too plainly at pickled onions, whose slipshod feet, dingy finger-nails, and affected gentility would be too heavy a burden even for affection—with Jarred; Jarred of doubtful honesty, doubtful cleanliness; Jarred the tricky and unscrupulous. From the thought of alliance with these Walter Leyburne recoiled with absolute horror.

In the second place he felt himself in a manner tacitly engaged to Flora. True that no word of love had ever passed between them; yet those gentle looks of hers, those gracious tones, were not the looks and tones of indifference. Could he, after all these months of happy fireside companionship, after being trusted by her father, coolly depart out of her life, and leave her, perhaps on the threshold of an awful parting—for Walter had seen the stamp of doom on Mark Chamney's face, and knew there must soon be severance for that devoted father and daughter—could he, knowing this, knowing how utterly lonely that poor child was, basely desert her, even if Bohemian Loo, with her gispy cleverness, pleased his fancy better? He knew that Mark Chamney looked upon him as his future son-in-law. Mark, always transparent as crystal, had said enough to reveal that hope which had been in his mind from the very beginning of his acquaintance with the young painter. Flora would have a fortune about equal to his own; Chamney had told him that. There could be no question of mercenary feeling here. But to marry Loo would be to fling himself into a nest of adventurers. Even if Loo herself were free from every thought of greed, from every worldly consideration—



and he was inclined to think her as indifferent to his wealth as Flora—could he doubt that Jarred and grandma, those advanced students in the school of poverty, were eager to draw him into their toils, and would pluck him mercilessly were he to fall into the snare?

It was a connection which any young man with a grain of common sense would avoid as he would shun the bottomless pit. And yet—and yet—what a noble creature Loo had looked to-night, as she stood by the open window looking out at the moonlit river! What power and genius in that darkly-pale countenance, those splendid eyes, the eyes which had inspired him with the first idea of his *Lamia*! The claret-coloured dress became her tall slim figure, harmonised wonderfully with her complexion, and the dense blackness of her hair. In that dress, in that careless attitude, so graceful in its unconscious repose, she had looked as much a lady as if her name had been written in Burke's *County Families*, her birthplace a baronial hall. Even her voice and manner of speaking had attuned themselves to his—she had lost the twang of Voysey-street.

"If she were my wife to-morrow I should be proud to show her to the world just as she is. No one would guess that she came out of a shop for second-hand gowns. If she and Flora were seen side by side, people would be more struck with her than with Flora; she has more style, more originality. She would look like a tropical flower beside an English primrose."

With such musings Mr. Leyburne beguiled the time till the dog-cart was ready. The result of his medita-

tion was almost negative. He felt himself very much where he was before. Loo pleased his fancy most, and an artist's fancy is so great a part of his life. Flora had the stronger claim upon his heart. Prudence said, "Marry Flora." Errant imagination whispered, "With whom are you so happy as with Loo?" Duty urged, "You are bound to Flora." Conscience suggested, "May you not have endangered Loo's peace of mind?"

He left the garden with an uncomfortable feeling that, do what he would, he must wrong somebody. That scheme of giving Loo a good education, upon which he had relied as a happy issue out of his difficulties, had been a failure. What else could he do to prove his friendship for this singular girl? If she would not accept education from him, she would, of course, reject all pecuniary help. She would take nothing from him; and he could not marry her. He must therefore leave her amidst the wretchedness in which he had discovered her, leave her with a keener appreciation of her misery.

Loo was waiting for him in the room where they had dined, and the dog-cart was ready. He had but a glimpse of her face as they went out through the lamplit door of the inn, but he saw that she was very pale, and he fancied he saw traces of tears upon the anxious-looking face.

"Come, Loo, don't be down-hearted," he said; "I thought you had more moral courage than to be afraid of a few cross words from your father, even if he should think we have stayed too late. I'll stand by you, come what may. Yes," he added, with a little gush of feeling, as he settled her comfortably by his

side in the dog-cart, and wrapped her in the warm shaggy rug—"yes, dear, I'll be true to you, come what may."

The words thrilled her. They had driven away from the inn, and were in a narrow bit of road, a mere lane leading up from that waterside tavern to the high-road, a dark bit of lane, sheltered and shrouded by over-arching trees. His breath was on her cheek, his disengaged arm, which had been busy arranging that rug for her comfort, clasped her waist, and drew her suddenly to him. Before she knew what was coming, his lips were on hers, in the first kiss of an irresistible love.

In the next moment they were on the moonlit high-road, and Mr. Leyburne had concentrated his attention upon his horse.

"You shouldn't have done that," said Loo, with a choking sound like a sob, as she readjusted her slightly disorganised bonnet.

"Do you think I don't know that I shouldn't? It was almost as bad as Paolo's kiss, and I deserve to float about in torment for it by and by—only with you, Loo. This shade should never leave you. O, Loo, why have you made yourself so dear to me? I want to do my duty to you, to everybody. I am almost engaged to that dear little girl in Fitzroy-square. I can't tell you how good she is, how pure and innocent and confiding. I verily believe she thinks me a demi-god, and that she'd be miserable if I were to desert her."

"Who wants you to desert her?" demanded Loo, in a hard dry voice. "I'm sure I don't. If you wished even—which of course you don't—to make a

fool of yourself for my sake, do you suppose I would let you? I know too much of the world for that, though I have been brought up in Voysey-street. Don't let's talk nonsense any more, please, Mr. Leyburne. It was very mean of you to act like that just now; but I'm willing to pass it over, if it isn't repeated."

"You say that almost like your grandmother, Loo. There's a touch of the old lady's dignity. I won't offend you again; it was the fault of the dark lane. But if you knew what I felt just then, I think you'd forgive me."

"But I don't know, you see," remarked Loo.

"I felt as if I could surrender all I care for most in the world for that one kiss—how much more easily for the sake of going through life with you for my companion! I've been utterly happy to-day with you, darling. And yet, if I am to marry Flora, this ought to be our first and last day together. It's such a perilous happiness, Loo. I wouldn't wish the repetition of it."

"If I'd thought you were going to talk to me like this, I wouldn't have come with you," said Loo.

How wildly her heart was beating all the time, and what exquisite joy she felt at the avowal her lips reproved! They were driving along the road between Thames Ditton and Kingston, the moonlit river flowing beside them; on the other side villas, with a light gleaming here and there in upper windows, denoting that the inhabitants of this peaceful region had for the most part retired for the night.

The horse flagged a little already, and Mr. Ley-

burne had to administer frequent encouragement with reins or whip.

"I'm afraid this fellow's done up," he said.

"Will he be very long getting us home?" asked Loo.

"I hope not. I daresay he'll go better presently when he feels his feet under him."

And in this hope they proceeded at a very moderate pace towards Kingston.

Who would have wished to hasten that moonlight journey, through scenes which, always fair, assumed a dream-like beauty in this tender light? Not Louisa assuredly, fearful though she felt of her father's probable anger. Not Walter, for this present hour was to him supremely delightful. The future was all cloud and perplexity, but the present was all-sufficing. They drove through the silent market-town, where a light in the casement of a solitary gable alone gave token of life. They mounted the hill, and were again alone with nature. That Portsmouth road has a solemn look after sundown, densely wooded here and there, and with steep banks that rise from the roadside on either hand. Silence was round them; they had night and the world all to themselves. Walter's lips, once loosened, were not easily locked, and between Kingston and Putney he had said everything which he had intended to leave unsaid. All his wise reflections in the inn-garden went for nothing. He poured his impassioned tale of a love that had stolen upon him unawares into Loo's too willing ear. The girl drank the poison, but showed more firmness and wisdom than her lover. By not a word did she betray the depth of her own feelings.

"Upon my soul, you're as cold as ice, Loo," he said at last, angered by her remonstrances or her silence; for she only spoke to reprove his folly. "One would think you were hardened in the ways of the world, and hadn't a spark of feeling left. You might as well tell me if you care for me, or if I'm making an idiot of myself for nothing."

"You sha'n't make me answer a question which you have no right to ask," Loo replied resolutely. "You promised to give me a day's pleasure in the country. Do you suppose I'd have come if I'd known you were going on at me like this? It's mean of you. If I could get out of the dog-cart and walk back to London, I'd do it."

"Don't talk like that, Loo; you don't know how it wounds me. I thought you cared for me—just a little. I shouldn't have humiliated myself if I hadn't thought so. Never mind; I won't say another word. I daresay Flora will marry me if I beg very hard."

"Of course she will; and she is the proper person for you to marry. Nobody ever doubted that. And you know you love her, and think her like some innocent spring flower, white and pure and delicate, too tender to be left alone in the hard rough world," said Loo with heroic unselfishness, reminding him of his own words.

"Very well, Loo, since you wish it I'll say no more," he answered with dignity, and again devoted all his attention to the horse.

That tired steed was in such sorry condition, that it was nearly two o'clock when they drove slowly down Voysey-street, making an awful hollow-sounding clatter upon the uneven stones; Loo possessed by nameless fears. What would her father say to this

post-midnight return? How might he not abuse her? Too well did she know that hideous vocabulary which he employed in moments of passion. She trembled as they drew near the house, from whose blank windows shone no friendly gleam of light.

There was no difficulty about holding the horse. That exhausted quadruped had little inclination to move, though he must have been sentient of the neighbourhood of his stable.

Walter dismounted and rang the bell, first cautiously, as to an ear awaiting the sound; then, after a pause, with a louder appeal; then still more loudly; but after ten minutes' patient expectation no one had come to open the door. Loo's white face looked at him awfully.

"Grandma must be asleep," she faltered. "You had better ring again."

He had his hand upon the bell when the door opened suddenly with a jarring noise, and Jarred Gurner confronted him in a *negligé* costume that was remarkable neither for cleanliness nor elegance. A dark red-flannel shirt open at the brawny swarthy neck, a pair of trousers tied round the waist with dirty cotton braces, bare feet, and tousled hair denoted a hurried rising from his bed.

"Who's there?" he demanded, not without an expletive.

"Your daughter," answered Walter. "I'm sorry to have kept her out to such an unreasonable hour. We left Thames Ditton in capital time; but that beast of a horse was dead-beat."

"Who did you say?" asked Jarred, regardless of the explanation.

"Come, Jarred, no nonsense. You're not going

to be angry with your daughter for such a trifle—altogether my fault.”

“My daughter!” echoed Jarred, with a strident laugh. “She’s no daughter of mine. I don’t deal in daughters who stay out with young men till two o’clock in the morning. Take the baggage away; she’s no business in this house.”

“Father!” cried Loo, pushing past her defender, who had kept himself well in front of her till this moment; “father!” she cried, with piteous appeal, “you’re not going to turn me out of doors; you’re not going to ruin my good name for ever! Father!” with tones that rose almost to a shriek as Jarred half shut the door against her, “you can’t mean to shut me out! What have I done to deserve it?”

“You best know that,” he answered. “Let the gentleman who has kept you out till two o’clock find you a lodging in future.”

He shut the door with the last word. They heard the bolts pushed home, the rusty key turned, the chain put up—as if there were anything that needed the defence of bolts and bars in Jarred Gurner’s domicile.

Loo stood aghast upon the doorstep. Her father had been less abusive than his wont; but he had done a thing which even her fears had never imagined.

“Never mind that brute,” said Walter, almost choking with anger. “I’ll take you to some respectable hotel. Don’t be frightened, Loo. I’ll take as much care of you as if I were your elder brother.”

The girl planted herself on the doorstep, deadly pale, and with an angry light in her eyes.

“I have a good mind to stay here all night,” she said. “To think that he should turn against me like



that—my own father! And I've always been so fond of him!"

"He's a beast," exclaimed Walter; "and I daresay he was drunk."

"No, he was sober," answered Loo; "that's what I feel the hardest. If he'd been drinking, I shouldn't have minded so much; I could have borne it better. But he was quite cool—he didn't even use bad language. What can he think of me to treat me so?" demanded the girl passionately.

"I tell you, he's a beast," repeated Walter, who could not get beyond that point. "Don't let's worry ourselves about him. Jump into the dog-cart, Loo, and I'll drive you to some respectable hotel. There's a place I know in the Strand where they stop up late for travellers."

"I won't stir out of Voysey-street," cried Loo with determination. "What! go away with you after what he said to me! I should like to stay on this doorstep all night, and for father to find me here to-morrow morning; but I suppose the policeman wouldn't let me. I'll knock up Mrs. Murgis at the general-shop. Mary Murgis and I went to school together at Miss Peminto's over the way, and I know Mary will give me a night's shelter."

"What's the good of a night's shelter? You can never go back to that house again."

"Can't I? It's the only home I have to go to. Do you think I'm going to be turned out of it in disgrace? I'll go back the first thing to-morrow morning, please God, and have it out with father."

"I tell you, Loo, it's impossible," cried the young man warmly. "Go back to that man's house after the insult he has just put upon you! You sha'n't

do it. I told you I would be true to you, come what might. You shall never cross that threshold again, Loo. I'll take lodgings for you to-morrow."

"I've heard of that before," said Louisa in a freezing tone. "I've heard of people having lodgings taken for them, and sometimes of its going so far as a brougham and a pug-dog. I'd rather not, thank you!" with asperity.

Not a wild-wood blossom by any means, this young woman; not a snowdrop, whose petals no poisonous breath had ever polluted; but stanch and pure after her own fashion.

"Loo!" cried Walter indignantly, "do you think I am a scoundrel? Do you suppose I could be guilty of one unworthy thought in such an hour as this?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Leyburne. I daresay you're good and true," the girl answered remorsefully; "only I feel as if the world was all wickedness—when my own father, that I've worked and slaved for ever since I was a child, can cast me out."

"You sha'n't go back to his house, Loo. Get a night's shelter from Miss—what's her name?—if you like. You shall go to a boarding-school to-morrow. You'll be safe there. And I'll go and tell your father where you are, and that you've done with him."

"Done with him!" the girl echoed plaintively. "There was a time when I thought the world was only father."

Walter lost no time in knocking up Mrs. Murgis at the general-shop. It was a dingy passage enough into which he and Loo were admitted when Mrs. Murgis arose from dreams and came down to answer that importunate bell, sorely troubled by fears of fire,

or ill-news from her married daughter at Ball's-pond. But Mrs. Murgis was kind, and listened to Loo's sad tale with sympathetic "tut-tuts" and "you don't say so's," and said that she could have half Mary's bed, and welcome; and thus Loo was safely disposed of for the night.

"You shall go to boarding-school to-morrow, whether you like it or not, Loo," said the young man eagerly, at parting. "I look upon your father's infamous conduct as providential. Even your obstinacy can't hold out any longer."

"I'll go to school if you like," answered Loo despondently. "It'll make things smooth, anyhow, and make the way clear for you to marry the young lady in Fitzroy-square. It can't much matter to anybody what becomes of me, when my own father doesn't care."

"But it does matter very much to me, Loo," said Walter.

They were in the dark passage just at the foot of a steep little staircase, which good-natured Mrs. Murgis had ascended to prepare for the unexpected guest, and Walter felt sorely tempted to repeat that sin of the shadowy lane at Thames Ditton; but if it had seemed to Loo a meanness then, it would surely seem meaner now. He refrained, therefore, and only pressed her hand with an honest brotherly squeeze.

"Come what may, Loo," he said impressively, "remember I've promised to be true to you."

And with that pledge he bade her "good-night," and went back to the patient quadruped, languishing for his stable.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

"Spring still makes spring in the mind  
When sixty years are told ;  
Love wakes anew this throbbing heart,  
And we are never old.  
Over the winter glaciers  
I see the summer glow,  
And through the wild-piled snowdrift  
The warm rose-buds below."

BRANSCOMB is not a fashionable watering-place; there is neither pier nor band, nor has any joint-stock company yet been found eager to experiment on the capabilities of the situation by the erection of a monster hotel eight stories high, with Louvre windows commanding the wide-stretching Channel and distant Atlantic. Branscomb still languishes in obscurity; no speculative charlatan has discovered the peculiar balm of its atmosphere, and published it to the world as an elysium in whose calm breast lurk healing and the renewal of life. Branscomb produces nothing except a little lace—the patient work of women and children—is celebrated for nothing. Nobody, in the accepted sense of the word, was ever born at Branscomb. The name of the village figureth not in the Biographical Dictionary. Nothing ever comes from Branscomb. There is not so much as a ruined castle, historically famous, in the shadow of whose walls the frivolous may picnic. One dilapidated martello tower alone marks the landscape. Why built, it is rather difficult to imagine; for it is hardly within the limits

of the possible that any hostile invader would ever essay to land at Branscomb. The cliffs are bold and high, of a dark-red clay, rugged and crumbling-looking, as if of so loose a fabric that they might slip down into the ocean at any moment with briefest warning. Irregular in outline, grandly picturesque, is that western seaboard, while the inland landscape is fair as paradise.

Fishing is the chief, or indeed the only, resource of Branscomb. The village proper, the original Branscomb, is but a collection of fishermen's huts and a public-house or two. That Branscomb which visitors affect, and which calls itself a watering-place, boasts a little bit of Parade, bounded by a roughly built sea-wall, a dozen or so of smallish, lowish houses, with bow-windows, much wooden balcony and verandah, and gardens abutting on the Parade. On the higher ground beyond this spot certain adventurous builders, oppressed with the builder's speculative propensity and with no more promising field for its exercise, have tacked on a few meagre villas, standing desolate in quarter-acre enclosures, which neither cultivation nor climate has educated into gardens. There is the beginning of a terrace—five slim bow-windowed houses breasting the stormy winds on the rise of a hill; houses inhabited by the wealthier of the fishermen, whose wives and families subside into kitchens and outhouses whenever Fortune favours them with lodgers. All the year round the fly-blown cards hang in the parlour-windows, but only in the glare and blaze of the summer solstice come visitors to Branscomb. Then perchance a few families from Long Sutton enliven the scene: troops of noisy children,

who revel on the beach and scare the seagulls with their still harsher voices; a pair or two of maiden sisters, who pace meekly up and down the narrow path atop of the rugged cliff, and sniff the briny breezes from the Atlantic, and congratulate themselves on the acquisition of a store of health, to be put away, like the household linen or the best glass and china, for future use.

Ocean's strand at Branscomb is hard and stony. There is no stretch of level sand for the delight of youth and infancy, no chalky cave where young mothers can sit and gossip and make pinafores, while their little ones raise those frail and perishable castles which seem fit types of future endeavour and its vain result. The friendly homely beauties of Ramsgate and Broadstairs are not here; but in their stead a certain wild picturesqueness, a certain rugged grandeur, not without its charm.

The Branscomb season—that halcyon period when the Parade and the five villas and the six houses in the terrace are wont to brim over with human life, and the local butcher will display as many as six legs of mutton pendent from his grim array of iron hooks on a Saturday morning—had not yet begun. The local grocer, stationer, linen-draper, and fancy-repositor had not yet ordered his summer stock of one dozen pairs buff boots, thirteen as twelve. The two bathing-machines which enjoyed a monopoly of the Branscomb bathers still hibernated in the darkness of their winter shed. In a word, Branscomb had not yet awakened. Mr. Topsaw, the Long Sutton auctioneer, land-surveyor, and house-agent, had therefore ample room and verge enough for his selection of a house

adapted to the requirements—to use Mr. Topsaw's familiar phrase—of a gentleman of property and his daughter, and affording accommodation for the gentleman of property's friends. Under these fortunate circumstances, Mr. Topsaw naturally chose the most expensive of the villas, and took care to inform the proprietress thereof that terms were not a consideration to the gentleman of property; his own profit by the transaction being five per cent on the entire rental, to say nothing of the promise of a sovereign down on the nail, which Mr. Topsaw extorted from the lone widow who kept the house, by way of "dowser," as he expressed it, as a mark of gratitude for his selection of her above her fellows, when he had the world of Branscomb all before him where to choose, and might so easily have carried the sunshine of his favour elsewhere.

It appears in the common order of things that when a variety of detached dwellings besprinkle the outskirts of a town or village, the dwelling last erected and farthest from the station, if station there be, and all other amenities of the settlement, is the largest and most architecturally pretentious of the number.

This was the case with Branscomb. Its ultimate was a stuccoed villa of the Italian gothic order, surmounted by a campanile tower, whose sides were open to the winds of heaven, and whose roof had been copied from the tender simplicity of an extinguisher. The house stood higher than its neighbours, on a road that ascended gradually from the low-lying village to the level of the cliff, divided from its margin by a cornfield. There was a garden, or arid tract of land, which grew wallflowers, stocks, a scanty herbage

that passed for grass, and in their due season marigolds and mignonette; one lonely monthly rose languished against the stuccoed wall, and by way of wood a belt of scanty bushes of the coniferous or sea-side tribe, shaped like the plumes that adorn a hearse, had been planted within the open iron-rail that divided the grounds from the dusty road. This domain, which did not boast as much cedar as would have made a pencil, nevertheless derived its name from that stately tree, and was called the Cedars.

Remote and solitary as the place was, it enchanted Flora. It was at least different from Fitzroy-square; that vast sweep of ocean with its infinite variety refreshed her eye as water-pools restore the traveller in Arabian deserts. She declared herself enraptured, and showered grateful kisses upon her father's grizzled hair, as he sat by the drawing-room window—the summer merit of the Cedars consisted in its walls being almost entirely window—and rested after a fifteen-miles' coach-journey from Long Sutton.

"How good of you to come here, papa," she exclaimed; "and how clever of you to think of Branscomb, instead of letting me drag you off to Brittany or somewhere, tiring you to death with steamers, and rails, and diligences, and goodness knows what! I should think this must be quite as good as Brittany—as wild, and grand, and picturesque. Of course there are cathedrals there, and ruins, I suppose, and so on, for people to rush about and explore; but we can do very well without cathedrals, can't we, papa? or if we have a sudden yearning for gothic architecture, we can go to Rougemont for a day or two. Now, dearest father, say you are pleased with Brans-



comb, and that it's just as nice to-day as when you were a boy."

She said this with that tender anxious air which had become almost habitual to her of late in her intercourse with her father. A sad foreboding of sorrow to come had been creeping gradually home to her loving heart; the fact of her father's altered health had become a stern reality beyond his power of concealment. That he was weaker than of old, more easily tired, more subject to pain, were bitter truths he could no longer hide from the keen eyes of love. But the worst Flora knew not. She knew not that her father's life hung by a thread, and that any moment of the long summer day might be his last. She thought him changed, grown so much older in one short year, but she tried to believe that this was but the natural decline of the strong man's life, only the beginning of a long old age. Night and day she prayed God to spare him—to spare him for years to come, for all the days of her life; she could not imagine her life without him. Was it possible she could live, leave him lying in his narrow grave, hidden from the sunshine and the glory of the universe, and go on living, and even find some kind of happiness without him? She remembered one of the girls at Miss Mayduke's, whose father had died suddenly, and who had come back to school a few weeks afterwards in her black frocks. She had cried a good deal at first, in the dismal twilight interval between the studies, and at night in the dormitory; but her tears seemed to dry quickly enough, and she learnt her lessons, and ate her dinner, and looked forward to the holidays, just the same as the rest, and her

voice soon grew loud and clamorous in the playground, like the other voices.

Dr. Ollivant enjoyed Branscomb almost as heartily as Flora. He seemed a new man now that he had escaped from the scientific atmosphere of Wimpole-street; all the more so, perhaps, because he had also escaped from the society of Walter Leyburne, whose demonstrative youth had weighed him down a little, perpetually suggesting unpleasant comparisons, continually reminding him how he had let youth and all its opportunities of happiness slip by. A bitter thought, that, of one crisis in our lives when supreme happiness was just within our reach, and by the sheer perversity and triviality of youth we let it slip. A thought to brood over in after years with deepest remorse, with grief unspeakable; yes, verily, "a sorrow's crown of sorrow."

But Dr. Ollivant's memory could recall no such hour. He only reflected that youth was a wonderful and beautiful thing, and that he had sacrificed it upon the altar of science. He had put aside his youth altogether—bartered it, like Esau's birthright, for *his* favourite mess of pottage. He had won the great race by this very sacrifice; had outstripped the footsteps of his contemporaries, and placed himself in the ranks of eminent and successful men, who were from ten to twenty years his senior. Only he had paid the price. He had never allowed himself the relaxations or the affections of youth.

Not until of late had the knowledge of his loss come home to him. But seeing what a bright thing youth appeared in this stranger; he began to ask him-

self whether he had not been cheated out of a gift that was almost divine.

"If I had known Flora Chamney ten years ago," he thought, "if Fate had made us contemporaries, how different my life might have been!"

There were moments—brief intervals of infatuation no doubt—in which he used to ask himself if it were really too late; if he might not yet enter the lists with this younger and more attractive rival. Nothing definite had been said as yet; he knew that from Mark. The young man had hung back somewhat strangely, as it seemed to the fond father.

"And yet I'll answer for it he loves her," said Mark, in his impetuous way.

"He would be something less, or more, than human if he did not," answered the doctor.

But that purblind father drew no inference from the speech. He had set his heart upon seeing Walter and Flora married. The union would be perfect, like a marriage in a fairy tale. The idea that human passion could stir the breast of this grave pale doctor, with his deep-set thoughtful eyes, never entered Mr. Chamney's mind.

The doctor made the most of his holiday. After all, happiness is a thing of the present, and a man might be happy the day before his execution if the companion his soul loved dearest cheered him in his lonely cell. They chartered a fishing-boat, put up a rough awning to shelter them from the sun, and sailed merrily over those blue waters from after breakfast till dinner-time. When Mark was tired, they made him lie down upon a luxurious bed of sail-cloth

and carriage-rugs, and Flora read Shelley or Browning to him.

"I can't say I quite understand what they're driving at," he said; "but it's certainly soothing." Whereupon he would compose himself to slumber; and then, after a couple of pages or so, Flora would tire of Alastor, or Epipsychidion, and close her book, and talk to Dr. Ollivant.

It was curious to discover how little the doctor knew or cared about those modern singers, with whose music Walter Leyburne was so familiar. But then, on the other hand, he had read Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries with profoundest love, and had Homer in his heart of hearts.

"I thought you never read anything but medical and scientific books?" the girl said wonderingly, after he had opened the treasure-house of his memory for her entertainment.

"I very rarely do now. I had a passion for those Elizabethan poets when I was a lad, and for Homer. I think I half lived in the old Greek world—a fairy-land of dreams—still I began to see that science is something nobler than the memory of the past. I have Shakespeare and Homer in my consulting-room, and take down a volume once in a way, when I am more than usually tired; but that doesn't happen often. The inconvenience I most suffer from is want of time, not flagging attention; though, by the way, my thoughts have gone astray sorely lately." He said these last words with a regretful look at that innocent young face turned to him so frankly. Ah, what pain she gave him by that too candid friendliness, which told him he might be never more than friend!

"Of course," exclaimed Flora eagerly, "you are over-worked; papa is always saying so. See what harm he has done himself by working so hard in the prime of his life, though he will get over all that, and grow quite strong again by and by, please God. You ought not to slave like that, Dr. Ollivant. It is all very well when one is young, but as one grows older—"

"I promise to relax my labours somewhat when I am old," said the doctor; "but I can hardly claim the privilege of age yet awhile. Ancient as I doubtless appear to your young eyes, I am not forty."

"Indeed!" said Flora. She had the vaguest estimate of the various stages of life—whether a man were old at forty or only began to be old at sixty. In her juvenile imagination life after thirty was but a down-hill progress. Youth and good looks, with most things that sweeten life, disappear behind the crest of that hill which youth climbs so gaily. She could hardly imagine what the journey was like on the other side. She wondered a little at the doctor's half-complaining tone, as he must surely have put away all youthful aspirations ever so long ago.

"Was it too late?" he asked himself sometimes, with a wild flash of hope.

She listened with rapt attention when he talked to her. His conversation at least could charm her. She was even interested in his career—curious about that laborious youth which he had spent in parish drudgery or in foreign hospitals. Then he opened his heart and mind for her, and painted a life that was not altogether unheroic, not without some human in-

terest; but not a whisper, not a breath of youth's enchantment, nothing of love or woman's loveliness.

Once, deeming him so far removed from herself by reason of his advanced years, she was bold enough to ask a question that to him was startling:

"In all you tell me, you have never mentioned—" she began rather shyly, and then was obliged to reconstruct her sentence: "I wonder that in all your travels you never met any one—whom you—whom you cared for well enough to marry."

He looked at her with that strange half-bitter look whose meaning she could not read.

"Curious," he said, "wasn't it? Curious that I didn't tread the beaten track: fall in love with some respectable young woman at twenty; marry at twenty-three; go back to Long Sutton, and set up as a family practitioner; walk in the footsteps of my father, in short; and look forward with placid resignation to the day when my name should be written under his on the family tombstone. I daresay after all that is the happiest manner of life, if modern youth could only put aside its passionate aspirations for something better. After all, are not the lives of all men written in water? Our petty struggles to win fame are, for the most part, futile, or the reward of our labours as perishable as the Grecian's crown of wild olive. Yet perhaps a doctor, whose life is in a manner a hand-to-hand conflict with the great mystery of pain, may take a purer pleasure out of his smallest victories than the man who wastes his nights in verse-writing, or his days in painting pictures which could have been painted better three hundred years ago. *Our*

profession," with some touch of pride, "is at least progressive."

"It is a noble profession," said Flora, "and I don't wonder you are proud of it. But please don't run down our poor painters; even if Raffaele and Titian did paint better. They had popes, and emperors, and people, you know, to encourage them. I hope you don't despise painters."

"Hardly. Yet I confess there seems to me something rather ignoble in any profession which produces only ornament—a life entirely given to the cultivation of fancy."

"But you haven't told me why you didn't marry?"

"First, because I put the marriage question out of my mind altogether when I took up the profession of medicine."

"What, made up your mind to be an old bachelor!"

"No; but made up my mind to succeed in my profession before I ventured to contemplate the idea of marriage."

"Ah," said Flora, with a compassionate sigh, "that was a pity, because—"

"Because what?" he asked, when she stopped in the middle of her sentence.

"Because it takes such a long time to succeed in any profession, and—please don't be offended if I say anything that sounds rude—by the time a man has succeeded, he must be an old bachelor."

"An old bachelor! I suppose, now, in your mind that means any one on the wrong side of thirty?"

"Why, yes; at Miss Mayduke's we used to call

thirty old; but I daresay that's only a schoolgirl's notion."

"Do you think it quite preposterous, now, for a man of my age, much nearer forty than thirty, to have some idea of marriage?"

"Not at all," she exclaimed eagerly, and a gleam of gladness shot into the doctor's dark eyes, "provided you married a suitable person."

The pleased look faded as quickly as it had come.

"What do you mean by a suitable person? Some one of my own age, I suppose."

"Of your own age, or a few years younger. Not an old maid, with disagreeable prim ways, or a cat and a parrot: but some charming widow. There was a widow who had two daughters at Miss Mayduke's; her husband had been in the China trade—silk, or tea, or something. She used to dress so stylishly."

"Thanks. I abhor stylish widows. If I were forced to make an election between two evils, I would rather have the old maid with her cat and parrot. I should have a greater chance of peace. No, Flora, I will never marry, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I can love, and be loved again."

Flora twirled the leaves of her book, and gave another little compassionate sigh, faint as the summer breath that stirs a fallen rose-leaf.

Poor infatuated man! She was really sorry for him. As if any one could win all the brightest things of earth, and, after having given his youth to the swift race for fame, turn back and say, "O, but I also desire the joys of the rose-garden!" Why, the end of the



race leaves him far off in the bleak desert, the shingly Patagonian waste of middle age, where there is no rose-garden.

She felt a curious, half-scornful, half-tender pity for the grave doctor after this, and thought more of him and his lonely life than she had thought until now, wondering whether he would ever see any one of a suitable age, whom he could like; trying to imagine what kind of sentiment love must be between people who were past thirty; whether the gentleman would write romantic love-letters, and the lady would blush and tremble at his footsteps just the same as in youth. She could not imagine anything so incongruous as middle age and romance; she could only picture the courtship a business transaction, the marriage a sober prosaic affair, the bride dressed in silver-gray silk. Feeling therefore the utter impossibility of the doctor ever finding his way back to the rose-garden, she was particularly kind to him—dangerously, fatally kind—for she inflamed his passion to fever-point.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

"It is a painful fact, but there is no denying it, the mass are the tools of circumstance: thistledown on the breeze, straw on the river, their course is shaped for them by the currents and eddies of the stream of life."

THE Chamneys had been more than a fortnight at Branscomb, and Mr. Leyburne had not yet made his appearance. Flora began to feel deeply wounded by such persistent neglect. The doctor had been twice to and fro between London and the little Devonshire watering-place. While he could do so much for friendship and "auld lang syne," for the remembrance of those boyish days when Mark Chamney had been his champion and protector, Walter could make no sacrifice, take no trouble. And yet she had dared to think he would have been moved by a warmer feeling than friendship.

"After all, I must have made a mistake," she said to herself with a regretful sigh, as she put on her coquettish little hat to go for a seaside ramble with the indefatigable doctor, who had only come down from London that afternoon, and yet was ready for an evening walk; "I have been deceived by the kindness of his manner, that flattering manner which evidently means nothing. What should a poor little schoolgirl know about a young man's feelings? We never saw any young men at Miss Mayduke's, except the drawing-master, who must have been thirty if he was a day; and we were always making mistakes about him. I

know Cecilia Todd fancied he was breaking his heart for her, till he calmly announced to us one morning that he had been engaged for the last five years to the music-mistress in a school at Highbury."

It was not without a good many gentle sighs that Flora resigned herself to the idea that Mr. Leyburne had never cared very much about her; that he only regarded her as a young person whose company was agreeable enough to amuse the leisure of an idle evening, and no more. Even after she had settled this matter in her own mind, she found herself just as anxious about the arrival of the London express—or rather the blundering, rumbling old coach which brought passengers from the Long Sutton station—just as expectant of a lightly-built, active-looking figure ascending the steep road that climbed the cliff to the Cedars. She looked out for him every day, from the gothic window of her bleak little dressing-room; and Branscomb seemed less beautiful, and yonder waste of waters less magnificent every evening, when the passengers from the coach had had time to go their several ways, and still Walter came not.

"I should have thought he would have hated London in such weather as this, and would have seized upon any excuse to get away from it," mused Flora; "those grimy old streets—those everlasting squares—that smoky atmosphere! Who would stay in London when the woods are full of flowers, and the sea changes colour every hour with the changing sky? A painter, too, who ought to be so fond of Nature. It's all very well to talk about finishing his picture; but now the Academy is open there can be no reason

for his being in a hurry. He can't exhibit the picture before next year."

Mr. Chamney expressed his wonder at the young man's non-appearance, and those remarks of his were somehow painful to Flora. She felt as if it were her fault that Walter Leyburne was so slow to come. If she had been prettier or more attractive, she told herself, he would not have been such a laggard. Her father had hinted his wish about Walter too broadly for her to be unaware of that fancy. She knew that he would have liked Walter Leyburne to fall in love with her; that he had given the young man every encouragement to avow himself. It was humiliating to think that he had hoped in vain; that she lacked the power to win the lover her father would have chosen for her.

"I'm a poor little insignificant-looking thing," she said, as she contemplated her small face in the glass—a face whose beauty was pale and delicate as the loveliness of a wood anemone, a little white flower that a child would tread upon unawares while darting after a tall gaudy foxglove. Flora saw no charm in the small oval face, the tender gray eyes with their dark lashes, the little cupid's-bow mouth; she felt that she lacked the splendour of beauty which a painter would naturally require in the object of his adoration. What was she compared with Gulnare the magnificent? that Gulnare whose dark and florid charms, eyes big as saucers, lips carmine and pouting, she had copied in crayons. She felt herself a very poor creature indeed, and wondered that she had ever been so foolish as to fancy Walter could care for her.

This conviction had taken deep root, when one

warm June evening brought a glad surprise to dispel it. They had been for a long drive to Didmouth—a sister watering-place, with greater pretensions both to beauty and fashion than humble Branscomb. The doctor had been with them, the day lovely, and they had dawdled away a couple of hours pleasantly enough, lunching at the hotel by the beach, and strolling through the one narrow street, Flora stopping every now and then to look at the lace in rustic shop windows—lace which Mark was ever ready to buy for his little girl. What could be too good or too rare for her who was all the world to him?

They had stayed out rather later than usual, and the sun was low when their hired wagonette, a homely vehicle, drove up the hill to the Cedars. Leaning upon the gate, with folded arms and cigar in mouth, was a figure Flora knew but too well. Her heart gave a leap at sight of him. All the face of creation changed and brightened in a moment, glorified by Hope's supernal light. She had given him up; she had told herself that he cared nothing for her, set no value even on her sisterly friendship, had never dreamt of winning her love. His presence seemed to falsify all her forebodings. She accepted it at once as the promise of happiness. He cared for her a little—nay, perhaps even loved her—or he would hardly be there.

His attitude was the perfection of comfortable laziness; arms loosely folded, eyes gazing seaward, cigar-smoke curling upward in blue wavelets against the rosy evening light. His gaze was so intent upon yonder expanse of ocean, his thoughts so completely abstracted, that he did not even hear the wheels of

the wagonette—did not look up till it stopped in front of him. Then, indeed, he was all smiles and brightness, made haste to open the gate, assisted Flora to alight, and shook hands effusively with Mr. Chamney.

"I thought you'd forgotten all about us," said Flora's father, a little wounded by his neglect.

"No, indeed; but I've had so much to do, and I've been rather worried."

"You look like it. Late hours, I daresay, young gentleman. Never mind; you'll leave off that sort of thing when you've a nice little wife to keep you in order."

Walter coloured like a girl, and stole a guilty look at innocent Flora, whose face was radiant with happiness. No one could mistake that expression; no one could misread the deep joy shining out of those clear eyes. Dr. Ollivant had seen her face light up just now, and knew what that happy look meant. What would he not have given to have caused that brightness? What sacrifice would he have counted too costly?

"Indeed I did not forget your kind invitation, Mr. Chamney," pleaded Walter; "but I couldn't get away sooner. I had one or two little bits of business to settle before I could leave London."

"Business! One would think you were a merchant. However, here you are. We must be satisfied if we get the leavings of your time, mustn't we, Flora?" added Mark, with a touch of bitterness.

"Of course, papa. Mr. Leyburne has his profession to think of before everything," replied Flora, in a sweet excusing tone, as if she could have forgiven anything in this modern Raffaele.

Walter coloured again. He had not touched a brush since the Chamneys left town.

"Dear Miss Chamney," he said, "you are always so good. I should be miserable if your papa thought I did not value his invitation and the privilege of being down here. Honestly, I could not come sooner."

"My dear fellow, do you suppose any one doubts your word?" said Mark heartily.

Some one did doubt it—the doctor, whose watchful eye had noted the young man's embarrassment, that red flag of distress which he had hung out more than once during this brief dialogue.

"There's something not quite right here," thought Cuthbert Ollivant. "A pity, since this foolish child is so fond of him."

After this they went indoors and sat down to a comfortable tea-dinner, and every one seemed happy. Walter rattled almost as gaily as of old in the cheerful Fitzroy-square evenings. Flora sat between her father and the new arrival, Dr. Ollivant opposite. The table was small, and they made the snuggest possible family party; the doctor carving, and making himself generally useful, but not talking very much, not by any means so eloquent as he had been wont to be when they were only a trio. But no one marked the change. Mr. Chamney leaned back in his easy-chair, sipping his tea, and watching and listening to the two young people. It was so pleasant to him to hear their fresh young voices, to sun himself in their smiles and glad looks. And Walter, who had little more resistance than a bright water-flower, which moves with every motion of the stream whereon it grows, suffered

himself to be beguiled by the influence of the hour, and behaved just as if there had been no such person as Loo in existence; as if that moonlit journey from Thames Ditton had been nothing more than a dream.

Flora had hired a piano, of course, being as little able to exist without music of some kind as the canaries to dispense with their daily rations of bird-seed. After tea they went to work at the old duets, the tender bits of Mozart, the old-fashioned English ballads which seemed to have been composed on purpose for Flora, so exquisitely did that fresh young voice express words and melody. Flora's singing was the one fascination which Walter could not resist. Her talk was not so vigorous or amusing as Loo's, her beauty far less striking or varied; but her song never failed to enrapture him. While he listened he was her slave. Mark Chamney sat at the open window, half in and half out of the room, smoking his cigar, and listening contentedly to his little girl's singing. He did not know that it was absolutely perfect of its kind. He only knew that it was just the kind of singing he best liked.

It gave him unspeakable happiness to see those two together again, and to fancy that the link which he had dreamed of between them was as strong as ever. He had been unhappy at the young man's apparent hanging back; but he, like Flora, accepted his coming as a sign of loyalty and devotion.

"How could he help loving my little girl?" thought Mark.

After the singing, Flora, who was now in the highest spirits, took Walter to see her new domain—the



garden which grew so little, the wall which was to be covered with myrtle and roses when they came back to Branscomb next year; for they meant to come, Flora told Mr. Leyburne; they liked Branscomb too well to be tired of it in a single summer.

"You can join us in our ramble if you like, Dr. Ollivant," she said graciously; and then, feeling that she had been somewhat neglectful of her father's friend since Walter's arrival, she added an entreaty: "Do come, please, and help me to illustrate the beauties of Branscomb. They call it illustration, don't they, at the panoramas? Do come with us, Dr. Ollivant."

What could he do but obey?

"Being your slave, what should I do but tend upon the hours and times of your desire?" he said with a light laugh, and flung away his half-smoked cigar, and gave Flora his arm, as much as to say, "If I go with you I will have something."

Walter could not very well ask for the other arm, which would have seemed like pinioning such a poor little thing as Flora. So he strolled by her side, and they crossed the moonlit grass—the moon had grown old and young again since Loo's day in the country—and went along by the edge of the cliff, upon a narrow path that had a delightfully dangerous look, and promenaded the little bit of parade, where Flora made Walter admire the quaint old wooden houses, with no two windows alike, twinkling gaily with lights; for visitors had now begun to arrive at Branscomb for the bathing season. Then she took him down to the pebbly beach, which was loose and uncomfortable for the feet, but infinitely picturesque—a broken

irregular line of beach, making a shallow bay—with fishermen's boats and tackle scattered about in every direction, and the whitest, most rustic of coastguard stations standing boldly out on a little promontory in the distance.

"You'll paint some delightful sea-pieces, won't you?" asked Flora. "Dear little fisher-boys and fisher-girls with ruddy complexions and big feet and hands, and their mouths open as if they were in the act of swallowing the sea-breeze, and a salt sea-weedy look about everything."

"Thanks," said Walter with his languid air; "unless I felt pretty sure of becoming a Hook or a Stanfield, I couldn't give my mind to sea-scapes, or fishermen's boys, or brown-sailed luggers, or any of those varieties of sea-coast life which people so keenly appreciate in every exhibition of pictures."

"I forgot; you are going to be a Holman Hunt or a Millais," said Flora, with a shade of disappointment. It would have been so nice to sit on the beach all through the sunny morning, sheltered by a canvas umbrella, watching Walter sketch, and improving herself by his example. "I tried to sketch by myself," she said dolefully, "when we first came. But my sea used to get so muddy, and my skies would come out like mottled soap, so I gave it up in despair."

"You dear foolish child," said Walter sagely—he had come to Branscomb sternly resolved to treat Flora in all things as a child, a sweet younger sister, and to go back unfettered and uncommitted—"why are you always dabbling in colours, instead of trying to master

the difficulties of form? I thought you were going to work at that cast of a foot I gave you."

"That big, muscular, plaster-of-paris foot!" sighed Flora. "I did work at it honestly for the first few days; I did it in ever so many positions. But feet are so uninteresting, and there was the sea looking lovely before my windows, and moist colours are so tempting, I couldn't help trying my hand at the little fisher boats, and the blue dancing waves?"

They left the beach, and peeped at the small original Branscomb, the fishermen's cottages sunk below the level of the road, which had risen with the march of ages, reducing the cottage parlours to cellars. It was all quaintly ancient and picturesque; and Walter owned that, for any painter who did not aspire to the classic, Branscomb would be full of subject.

"It's just the place for a man who wants to paint pot-boilers," he said. "There's not a corner of the village that wouldn't make a little rustic bit which would be a safe five-and-twenty guineas before the first week in May was out. But, thank Heaven and my uncle Ferguson, I can get on without pot-boilers. I'll do a little picture for your father, though, Flora, if you think he'd like it—a *souvenir* of Branscomb."

"Of course he'd like it. He'd be charmed with it. How good of you to think of such a thing!" exclaimed Flora. "And now we must go home, or papa will be sitting up too late."

This was the beginning of a fortnight of summer days, in which Flora was completely happy.

Dr. Ollivant went back to his duties the day after Walter's arrival, promising to return in a fortnight,

and making as light of the journey as if it had been the hour and a quarter between London and Brighton. Dr. Ollivant departed, but he was not essential to Flora's happiness. She was indeed happier without him, now that she had Walter for her companion; for she was dimly conscious that, let the doctor be never so civil, he was not the less antagonistic to Mr. Leyburne. Cynical speeches seemed to slide unawares from those thin firm lips; nay, by a simple elevation of the eyebrows the doctor's expressive face could indicate how poorly he thought of this paragon of youths. Flora felt it a relief, therefore, to be alone with Walter and her father, to feel that there was no element of cynicism or disbelief in the painter's genius, or the painter's future, among them.

So they sailed upon that summer sea, or went for long excursions in the wagonette, exploring every nook and corner of the country, or they dawdled away the long sunlit days on the beach, reading, sketching, dozing. Mr. Chamney, at least, got rid of a considerable portion of the summer afternoons in placid slumber; while Walter and Flora sat beside him talking, or reading poetry in low monotonous murmurs, slumberous as the gentle plash of wavelets against the beach. This holiday of mind and hand, this utter idleness beside the sea, seemed sweeter than any leisure Walter had ever known. He was not in love with Flora—he reminded himself of that fact half a dozen times a day with a remorseful pang, when he had been betrayed into some lover-like speech, which was calculated to mislead this tender innocent who loved him so well. He knew that he was very dear to her; he had read the secret a hundred times in the

artless face, had been told it over and over again by the artless lips.

"She is the dearest little girl in the world," he said to himself, "and Chamney is a dear old fellow, and I'm bound to marry her."

And then there flashed back upon him the vision of that moonlit road between Kingston and Wimbledon, and memory recalled the words he had said to Louisa Gurner, the stolen kiss in the lane, those deep dark eyes into which he had looked for one passionate moment with love that recked not of worldly wisdom's restraining power—love which in that one moment had been master of his soul—love before whose fierce tide all barriers of circumstance had gone down. He remembered Loo, and it seemed a hard thing to forsake her; poor Loo, who had been turned out of her wretched home for his sake, perchance with blighted name; for the social law of Voysey-street upon the subject of reputation was stern as the laws of Belgravia. Black sheep lived there and were tolerated; but the mark once set upon them remained indelible, and they were only tolerated in their character of black sheep, and had to suffer the sting of sarcastic reference to past peccadilloes upon the smallest provocation.

Loo had suffered in her tenderest feeling—her love for her reprobate father. Loo had possibly suffered the loss of that irrecoverable treasure, woman's good name. Mr. Leyburne had done his best for her, after his lights, by placing her forthwith in the care of the Miss Tompions of Thurlow House, Kensington, where she was to be thoroughly grounded in all the branches of a useful modern education. He

had told the elder Miss Tompion that he intended his protégée to remain in her care three years, and that lady had assured him of her power to impart a sound education in that period, and to qualify her pupil for the post of governess to children under twelve years of age.

"Accomplishments," said Miss Tompion, "are flowers of slow growth; but if Miss Gurner have a taste for music—"

"She has!" cried Walter eagerly.

"She may be able to impart instruction in music to girls of twelve after three years' painstaking study on her own part. She is painstaking, I hope?"

Walter did not know. He knew that this poor girl had worked hard at the dull slavery of household toil, that she had a mind quick to learn; but could not answer for her perseverance or laboriousness in this new path she was about to tread.

"She is very quick in learning anything," he answered, "and has a remarkable love of literature—especially poetry."

Miss Tompion looked doubtful.

"A taste for poetry, acquired under the guidance of a cultivated understanding, after education has formed the mind, is a source of delight to its possessor," she said solemnly; "but an ignorant undisciplined love of poetry in an ill-regulated mind I should consider a fatal tendency, and one I should deem it my duty to check, even to the verge of severity," added Miss Tompion, with an awful look at Loo, who was crying behind her veil.

Walter recalled this little scene in the primly-furnished drawing-room at Thurlow House, and re-

membered with keenest pang how Loo had cast herself sobbing on his shoulder at parting.

"It's ever so much worse than Voysey-street," she had whispered to him. "Do—do ask father to take me back! I'll go back to the scrubbing, the dirt, the debt—anything would be better than *this!*"

"This" meant Miss Tompion's solemn aspect, as she stood tall and straight, the incarnate image of starched propriety, in the midst of that temple of Minerva, the Thurlow House drawing-room, an apartment in which not a chair was ever seen out of its appointed space.

He had left Loo in this ladylike imprisonment, after giving a reference to his solicitor, which had convinced Miss Tompion of Loo's respectability; a fact she might have been inclined to question, had it not been supported by the solicitor's guarantee. That claret-coloured silk dress and Louisa's striking appearance had gone a little against Mr. Leyburne's protégée in the well-ordered mind of the school-mistress.

Having disposed of Louisa's life for the next three years, Mr. Leyburne might be fairly said to have relinquished all farther concernment in her fortunes or fate. Certain quarterly payments he would have to make during her pupilage; but at its termination she would go out into the world an independent, self-supporting young woman, and the thought of her need trouble him no more. Yet, in having done this much, he felt as if he had done nothing for her—absolutely nothing—when weighed against that one stolen kiss in the shadowy lane.

The image of the absent Louisa, therefore, was

apt to come between Mr. Leyburne and Flora when he was most inclined to be happy, and it always brought perplexing thoughts in its train. There were hours when it seemed to him that Flora's sweetness of disposition was the one charm which a man should choose to brighten his life; there were other hours when he thought that Flora might be but a childish helpmate for one who hoped to be distinguished by and by.

Mark Chamney looked on meanwhile, innocent as one of the sheep he had reared on the Darling Downs, and told himself that all was well, and his little girl's future a settled thing. Who could see those two together and doubt their love for each other?

"I always felt that it must be so," he said to himself; "I always knew that Providence meant them for one another. Providence is too good to leave my little girl alone in a cold unloving world. God has raised up a heart to comfort and cherish her when I am called away."



## CHAPTER XV.

"The face of all the world is changed, I think,  
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul  
Move still, O, still, beside me, as they stole  
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink  
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,  
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole  
Of life in a new rhythm."

AT the end of the fortnight the doctor came back, looking all the worse for his London work, haggard and pale and careworn. His friends noticed the alteration. He had been working too hard, they said.

Unhappily for Dr. Ollivant, however, it was not professional labour that had wrought the change in him. He had been trying to live without Flora, trying to forget the charm of her presence, schooling himself to endure his life without her or any hope of future union with her; trying his uttermost, and failing piteously. Love, when he fastens on a victim of Cuthbert Ollivant's age, is not the tricky spirit that leads youth along the path of pleasure with a chain of roses. The Eros of middle-life is an implacable master, who binds his slave with fetters of iron, and drives him with an iron goad.

Mark Chamney welcomed his old schoolfellow with more than usual heartiness. He was happier than when they had parted, happy in the assurance of Flora's future. The grip of his hand had all its old strength.

"You look all the better for Branscomb, Mark," said the doctor.

"Do I? Well, you see, I've been enjoying myself more than usual this last week or so."

"Hardly complimentary to me," said the doctor.

"Don't suppose I haven't missed you, Ollivant, for I have. My pleasure has been purely vicarious. I enjoyed seeing our youngsters together. Walter and Flora have been so delighted with the place and the fine weather and each other. It has done my heart good to watch them."

The doctor's face clouded, as it always did at any mention of Walter Leyburne. Master of himself as he was in all other respects, he had not yet learned to govern himself in this.

They had planned various excursions for the week—a drive to an old church among the verdant wooded hills, called Tadmor in the Wilderness; a church which had long been disused except in connection with the picturesque secluded burial-ground that stretched at its feet; a church which, according to west-country tradition, was one of the oldest in England.

The wagonette was in attendance at eleven o'clock next morning, and Flora prepared with a neatly-packed basket, containing a pigeon-pie and a pound-cake, a punnet of big scarlet strawberries and a bottle of cream, with other bottles, et cetera, which made the basket rather heavy. She had shawls and rugs in abundance, lest dear papa should feel cold, and was full of loving care for his safety.

Walter was to be coachman, an office for which he had begged earnestly. Mark took the seat at his

side, so Flora and the doctor sat opposite each other in the wagonette, an arrangement which filled the doctor with delight. He had come back to Branscomb reckless of the future, determined to get just as much happiness as he could get out of the present, without after-thought or calculation. To sit opposite to her in that rustic vehicle; to see every change of shadow and sunlight that flitted across her innocent face; to talk to her and listen to her gentle intelligent replies; to be with her undisturbed, her companion and friend and counsellor! What deeper joy need he ask of the present hour than this?

He shut his eyes to the future, therefore, and abandoned himself, heart and soul, to this immediate happiness. Mr. Chamney was in a talkative mood; went over his Australian experiences—familiar ground to Walter; and the young man had about as much as he could do to attend to his companion and the horse—no time for turning round to talk to Flora, except for an occasional word or two about the beauty of the landscape. Three of the party had to alight a good many times to walk up the hills, which are of the steepest in this district. But the doctor insisted that Mark should keep his place—such hills as these were not for him to climb. He assented with a sigh.

"It's a hard thing to get old and feeble," he said. "When I think of the mountains I've scaled in Australia, and find myself unequal to these molehills, I am disagreeably reminded of age and decay."

Walter led the horse, and Flora and the doctor walked side by side. He told her all about the wild-flowers she gathered from the steep green banks be-

side the road: their names, their properties—all the attributes that tradition or poetry had given them.

"To think of your being a botanist!" exclaimed Flora, wondering at his knowledge.

"I should be a poor physician if I didn't know as much about simples as an old woman. There was a time when the world was, for the most part, doctored by old women; Hecate-like hags who found healing—or sometimes death—in every hedge. There is hardly a leaf in yonder bank which might not be used for good or ill. Nature has no negatives."

The drive lasted a long time in this leisurely fashion, walking up all the hills, and walking down the steepest descents, loitering on lofty spots to admire the landscape, stopping at a roadside farmhouse for a draught of new milk, and otherwise dawdling, so that it was two o'clock when they mounted the last hill, and found themselves at the gate of the old burial-ground.

It would have been a sacrilegious thing to picnic among tombstones, so they carried the basket into a little bit of wood which bordered the old churchyard. The horse and vehicle were disposed of at an adjacent farmhouse—the only dwelling in sight of the church.

Utter silence reigned in the wood—silence and solemn beauty. Who can wonder that unenlightened man worshipped his deity in groves and woods? To every mind the forest has a sacred air, and seems the natural temple of the invisible God. Darkness and silence are His attributes, and here they reign perpetual.

Flora drew closer to her father, awed by the silence,

as they entered this little world of shadow. That joyous spirit was suddenly clouded. Darkness and shadow reminded her of that awful shade which walks this world of ours, and hovers near us even in our gayest moments. She put her hand through Mark's arm, and looked up at his wan face.

"You are not tired, dearest papa?"

"No, Baby, not more tired than usual."

"That sounds as if you were always tired," she said anxiously.

"Well, darling, I don't pretend to be the fellow I was ten years ago in Queensland. But I mean to enjoy myself to-day for all that, so you needn't look unhappy, pretty one. Whatever span of life I have, remember that my latter days have been very pleasant, and that you have made their sunshine—always remember that, little one."

Flora threw herself on his breast with a sob.

"Papa, papa, you pierce my heart when you speak like that, as if we were not to have many happy years together—as if God could be cruel enough to part us."

"We must never call God cruel," said Mark solemnly. "Remember Him who knew deeper sorrow than man's wildest grief, yet did not complain."

The girl choked back her tears, and clung even more fondly to the father's arm.

"After all," said Mark Chamney gaily, "I daresay when our parting does come it will be to the sound of wedding-bells. My darling will think it no hardship to leave me when she departs with the husband of her choice."

"No, papa; no husband shall ever take me away

from you! Whoever wants me for a wife must make his home in my father's house. But I am a poor little insignificant thing, and I don't suppose any one will ever want to marry me. I feel as if I was born to be an old maid. See how fond I am of canaries! That's an awful sign."

Mark Chamney laughed aloud—the old genial laugh which neither pain nor weakness had changed.

"Why, Baby, do you think I'm blind? Do you suppose I can't see the state of the case between you and Walter?"

"Papa," said Flora seriously, "he doesn't care a bit for me."

"Then I don't know what caring means."

"Indeed, papa, you are quite mistaken. He likes me very well, perhaps, as a younger sister; but no more than that, I know."

"Mistaken! pshaw! as if my eyes were not keener than yours. It's the lookers-on who see the most of the game, Flora. But perhaps you don't like him?"

Flora was silent. Her father looked down at the sweet young face suffused with blushes—eyelids drooping, with tears on their dark lashes.

"Never mind, darling; I won't ask for an answer. I know, and the future will show which of us was right. And now, no more serious talk to-day. You enjoyed the drive up here, Baby?"

"O, yes, papa; the scenery is so lovely."

"And Ollivant is a pleasant companion, eh?"

"A delightful companion, papa. I felt a little cross at first when we set out—"

"At not having Walter?"

"I didn't say that."

"Of course not, Baby."

"But Dr. Ollivant talked so nicely that I couldn't help being interested. He seems to know everything, and understand everything—and he is so kind and thoughtful. I shall never be disagreeable about him again, papa."

"I'm very glad to hear that, Flora, for Ollivant and Leyburne are the only friends we have. Come, we'd better make this our halting-place. The other two will find us presently."

The other two had remained behind to see to the horse, and carry the basket between them. The halting-place Mark had chosen was a little opening in the wood, which revealed the wide-spreading panorama beyond, as seen through an arch of greenery. A tiny brook of clearest water rippled over the pebbles at their feet; a rugged bank crowned with tall pines offered a comfortable seat. Here Mark spread his furry rug, and stretched himself out in luxurious ease; while Flo's soprano voice called from a little knoll to give the basket-bearers notice of their destination. They arrived almost immediately, and the basket was unpacked with all the gaiety which usually attends the emptying of a picnic hamper. It was such a thoroughly silvan business altogether—the feast of the simplest—the banqueters the most temperate.

Dr. Ollivant, the grave physician, the man upon whom premature age was wont to sit as a garment, the recognised authority upon cardiac disease, was to-day the gayest and, to all appearance, the happiest of the revellers. There was not enough alcohol in that modest bottle of La Rose which the three men shared among them to inspire a spurious merriment—it was

all genuine mirth; and Mark listened and looked on admiringly, while Flora and the doctor talked. Walter, on the contrary, was more silent than usual. He was thinking of Loo's day in the country, and of what deep rapture such a scene as this would have inspired in that ardent soul. He remembered how she had spoken of *the Forest*, meaning Epping. It would have been pleasant to see her dark eyes glow with delight at sight of yonder wide sweep of hill and valley, verdure and woodland.

But it was a vain thought. Loo was treading the scholastic mill under the stern eye of Miss Tompion, and never more must he and she make holiday together.

The idea of her imprisonment, the memory of her last imploring look, saddened the painter in spite of himself. He hardly heard Flora's fresh young voice, or the doctor's graver tones. He began to feel tired of this holiday-life—tired even of Nature's beauty. The whole thing seemed childish. He turned from Dr. Ollivant with a scornful look, wondering that a man with some claim to intellectual distinction should be capable of finding delight in such foolish pleasures.

Mark Chamney noticed his moodiness.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Walter? You and Ollivant are like the old man and woman in the weather-glass—when one comes out, the other disappears. Your spirits were high enough yesterday, but now that Ollivant's here, they seem to have gone down to zero."

"I am not so learned as the doctor," sneered Walter, "and am not capable of enlightening Miss Chamney upon woodland traditions and superstitions



with the eloquence and erudition which have distinguished his conversation this morning."

"Jealous!" thought Mark, pleased. "Poor fellow! He's over head and ears in love with my little girl, and is jealous even of Ollivant."

Walter rose directly the simple feast was finished.

"I'll go for a ramble among the hills over there," he said, "while you all amuse yourselves exploring church and churchyard. I want to stretch my legs a little after that long drive."

Flora looked disappointed.

"Don't you want to see the church?" she exclaimed — "the oldest in England."

"I have no passion for old churches; but I'll come back in time for a look at it. We sha'n't leave here in a hurry, I suppose?"

"No, we can stay till five," answered Mark, looking at his watch. "It's just three. That gives you young people a couple of hours to amuse yourselves as you like. I shall indulge myself with a nap."

He made himself comfortable upon the rug, Flora assisting. She had forgotten nothing that could insure his comfort. She had brought an air pillow for his head, and the softest of Shetland shawls to enfold him in its fleecy web.

Not once did she look up at Walter as she knelt by the invalid's rustic couch. She, too, would have liked a ramble among those verdant hills; but it was not for her to propose it. She felt that he was unkind for wishing to leave her — that of all vain dreams her father's was vainest.

"Yet, only yesterday, I thought that he cared for me," she said to herself, with sorrowful resignation.

Walter lit his cigar, gave his friends a careless nod of farewell, and departed, promising to return in an hour.

Mark composed himself for slumber.

"You'd better take my little girl over the church," he said to the doctor; "that young fellow won't be back till it's time for us to start, I daresay. He's gone to think out some grand idea for a new picture, I'll be bound."

Flora sighed gently. Yes; that was it, perhaps. True artists must live sometimes apart, in a kind of cloudland. It was wrong of her to feel vexed with Walter for liking a lonely ramble.

"Shall we go and explore the old church?" asked Dr. Ollivant, after an interval of placid silence. Mark Chamney was fast asleep by this time.

"If you please," said Flora, waking from a reverie. "If you think papa will be quite safe here."

"I do not think any danger can assail him. There is no treacherous east wind. We may safely leave him for half an hour, and we shall be within call if he wants us."

Flora rose, and they went away together, side by side. Ah, happy, if life could have gone on thus, thought the doctor. He would have asked no higher delight than the passionless joys of this summer afternoon.

A little gate opened out of the wood into the old burial-ground, and they went in among rustic tombstones, moss-grown and decaying, with here and there a modern monument of higher pretensions, and here and there a humble wooden headboard with rudely-cut inscription. The ground was irregular; on one side

of the church a sleepy hollow, sheltered by perfume-breathing limes, a chestnut or two, and a rugged old oak which spread its branches wide over one quiet corner; on the other side, an open plateau commanding a wide range of country.

The church looked like a forgotten church in a forgotten land. The ivy had pushed in among the decaying stones of the tower, loosening the masonry; time and weather had honeycombed the stones in some places, and a heap of fallen rubbish in one corner hinted at swift-coming ruin. The upper half of the tower had been patched with boards on the windward side, and the lower half, which had once been the entrance to the church, was occupied by a clay-stained barrow, a pickaxe and spade, and some loose planks—the gravedigger's dismal plant.

After making the circuit of the church they found the village guardian of the temple, a man who was at once sexton and gravedigger and gardener—not that this churchyard in the wilderness knew much of the gardener's care, but here and there he pegged up a wandering rose-brier, or cut down a bank of dock and thistle.

He let them into the church, whose interior presented no remarkable feature—save, indeed, a primeval simplicity suggestive of a departed age. There flourished, on tall slate tablets, the Ten Commandments; that pillar of faith by which old-fashioned churchmen stand stanchly in these days of change. The most evangelical mind might have been satisfied that here at least lurked no popish blandishments, no trappings of Rome. Bare benches, a pulpit like a packing-case, bare walls rudely plastered, a brick floor, a cupboard

for the sacred books, another cupboard for the parson's surplice, a tablet or two to the honour and glory of departed churchwardens who had made small bequests for the support of the church—no more. The ivy creeping in at the diamond-paned casements, the blue sky seen athwart the dark tracery of an over-shadowing yew—these were the only beautiful things to be seen in the church of Tadmor in the Wilderness. Flora's interest was soon exhausted. That dull gray interior suggested no romantic memories—only the idea of fat farmers and their families worshipping in that barn-like edifice, Sunday after Sunday, with sluggish souls attuned to their sluggish lives.

They went back to the burial-ground, and here Flora found ample food for thought. She looked at the ages of the dead, and felt a little shock whenever she came to the record of some sleeper who had numbered less than her father's years when he was called away. Alas! how many, even in that rural region where death should be a tardy visitant, had been summoned in life's meridian! She turned from the tombstones with a shuddering sigh. The doctor, close at her side, and ever watchful of her face, noted look and sigh, and guessed the current of her thoughts.

"How hard that death should walk the world stealthily!" she said. "If there were one appointed hour for all to die, the common doom would be easier to bear. We should know the end must come, and prepare for it—prepare for death—prepare for parting. There would be no agony of suspense—no wavering hopes and fears. It is the surprise that is so cruel. Those we love are not taken from us in the course of

nature, but snatched away unawares. Tread where we may, we are on the edge of a grave. The days of man are threescore years and ten, says the Scripture. But that is not true. Look at my father," she cried passionately, bursting into tears; "can you promise me that he will live to be seventy?"

Those tears unmanned the doctor. Passion, so long restrained, slipped the leash. In a moment he was on his knees upon the grassy mound, clasping Flora's hands as she leaned against the sunken headstone, covering the poor little hands with kisses.

"My love, be comforted!" he cried; "God will not leave you desolate. If one great love must be taken from you, there shall be another—greater, stronger, more utterly devoted—to replace the lost affection. My darling, don't shrink from me like that. There never was a woman loved better than I love you—rarely a woman loved so well. You must have guessed it—you must have known it—even though to your mind I seem old and grave, and outside the pale of love and hope. Flora, pity me!"

That last appeal—a cry of anguish so utter—touched her in spite of her pained surprise.

"Pity you, Dr. Ollivant?" she said gently. "I do indeed pity you, if you can be so foolish—if there is any meaning in this wild talk."

"Meaning! It is the one meaning of my life. I never carried away the memory of a woman's face till I saw yours. The loveliest have passed before me like pictures in a gallery, or making even less impression on my mind. But I saw you—knew you—watched all your pretty looks, your gentle womanly ways—and my mind opened to the understanding of a new world.

Love and hope and home and wife and children—the idlest words men speak had not been emptier words for me till then. I knew you, and home and wife became the one purpose of my existence. God knows I have tried to do without that vain dream—to live without you; but I cannot—I cannot. If you will not be my wife, there is nothing before me but misery.”

“I am so sorry,” faltered Flora, very pale—frightened by the force of this passion, so terrible in its stern reality; not in the least like any lover’s talk she had ever imagined—“sincerely sorry that you should think of anything so impossible. Pray be reasonable, dear Dr. Ollivant; remember the difference of our ages.”

“It did not hinder my loving you—it would not prevent my making your life happy—if you would only trust me. I would be husband and father in one; protector, guide. Your youth, your innocence, your gentle yielding nature, need a stronger helpmate than some boy-lover whom you might choose for the brightness of his glance, the sunlight on his hair. Boy-and-girl love is a pretty thing in poetry, Flora, but poor stuff to stand the wear and tear of life. Trust a love that is the outcome of manhood, the fruit of a ripened mind, rather than that careless fancy of youth which is fleeting as the foam upon a shallow river.”

“O, dear,” said Flora, in sheer distress of mind, “what can you see in me—a poor little insignificant creature that no one notices? You who are so clever—you who know everything.”

“I never knew love till I knew you, Flora, or youth, or hope. You brought me the bloom of my late youth. At the time when other men are young, I was old. I

am as young as the youngest now. The heart is the true timekeeper."

"You are so good, so wise, so true a friend to papa," faltered Flora, half frightened, half flattered. There was a thrilling sense of power, of her own importance, in finding herself loved like this—a novel intoxication. Her glance softened, the tender curve of her lip relaxed into a gentle smile. She was sorry for the doctor's infatuation—a little proud of having inspired a passion so romantic. "If I had never known any one else—" she said hesitatingly.

"If you had never know *him!*" cried Cuthbert, hope rekindled by her softness, and with hope jealous anger. "If I had come first, and come alone, I might have had my chance. He robbed me—he who is incapable of an honest love."

"How dare you say that?" exclaimed Flora, flaming out. No name had been spoken—no name was needed to indicate the subject of their speech. "What right have you to set yourself up as his judge?"

"No right, Flora, but some experience of mankind. It is not hate or jealousy that speaks when I tell you that Walter Leyburne is incapable of a noble self-sacrificing love. It is conviction. 'Unstable in all things, thou shalt not excel.' He will never be a famous painter, for he is not true to his art. He will never be a faithful lover, for he has no constancy of purpose. He is that shifting sand which never bore a noble edifice. He is that wandering star of whom the apostle speaks: 'Clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.'"

"It is shameful of you to speak against him; shame-

ful; cowardly to depreciate him in his absence; and to quote scripture against him, as if St. Jude had any unkind feeling about poor Walter," added Flora, restraining her tears with a struggle. "Mr. Leyburne is nothing to me, or, at the most, only a friend; but I detest people who speak against my friends."

"Then you detest me, Flora?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry for that."

"I detest you when you are unjust and unkind," said Flora, half relenting. "Of course I can't altogether hate you, for you are papa's friend—his doctor too. You hold the keys of life and death, perhaps. O, be kind to him—take care of him! Don't punish me by neglecting him."

"Am I quite a dastard? Flora, if the waste of all my life could prolong your father's for a year beyond God's limit, I would surrender my life as freely for your pleasure as if it were a cup of water given to a thirsty wayfarer. What sacrifice of self would I not make for your sake—ay, even to the last worst sacrifice of all—to see you happy with another? On my soul and honour, if I had thought Walter Leyburne the man to render your life happy, this wild prayer of to-day should have remained unspoken. I would have locked my lips. No temptation—not even the sight of your tears—should have beguiled me from my steadfast silence. I would have gone down to the grave, adoring you to the last hour of my life, but with my love untold. I have strength and will and courage enough even for that, Flora."

"I know you are great. I believe you are good," answered the girl, looking up at him with wondering



eyes, awed by the depth and strength of his passion; "too good to make me unhappy by talking of this foolish love—so foolish since I am so unworthy of it."

"No, you are more than worthy. What is there on this earth better than youth and innocence for a man to adore? My tender violet, fresh and bright with the dew of life's morning, no ripe red rose that ever flaunted her beauty in the midday sun owns your gentle charm. O, Flora, can you not choose between a weak wavering fancy like Walter Leyburne's and a love so strong as mine? Alas, you know not how much I renounce for your sake, how sternly I had planned my career, and how little room there was in the plan of it for an absorbing passion. I never thought that love could be needful to my life till I knew you. You have awakened a dormant soul, Flora; you are bound to cherish, to succour it. Do not thrust it from you to perish in outer darkness. For me there is no medium between delight and despair—the blessedness of being loved by you and the blank misery of existence without you."

His words took deeper meaning from the sombre fire of his dark eyes—the utter intensity of look and action—the hand which clasped Flora's with a grip of iron, every vein defined in the white surface—every muscle rigid. Physiologists might have read the man's soul from no better indication than that firm strong hand. A man born to set himself against the impossible—resolute to recklessness, if need were.

"O, dear," exclaimed Flora piteously, "I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do! It is such a shock to me to hear you go on like this, Dr. Ollivant, when I have always looked up to you and respected

you, and been grateful to you for papa's sake. I beg you never to repeat this wild talk. Let us forget that you ever talked so. I hope you'll be happy by and by, and find some good clever wife, who will suit you ever so much better than a foolish little thing like me."

"Flora, if I had come first—if you had never known Walter Leyburne, would there have been any hope for me then?" he asked desperately, ignoring her wise little lecture.

"I am afraid not. You see, you are so many years older than I am. I don't think I ever could have thought of you in that light, even if—"

"Even if you had not loved Walter Leyburne," said the doctor.

"You have no right to say that. You know that Mr. Leyburne is nothing to me."

"God grant he may never be any more to you than he is now!"

"It would make no difference in my feelings towards you," cried Flora indignantly.

"God grant it for your own sake," said the doctor with a moody look.

He rose from the green hillock on which he had been kneeling all this time at the girl's feet, holding her slender wrist with that strong hand of his, constraining her to hear him to the end. He rose with a gloomy look upon his rigid face, and turned away from her. It was all over. He had said his say—prayed his prayer. He knew no farther plea that he could make. His glimmer of hope—the pale ray that had lured him on till now—was extinguished for ever.

He was not angry with Flora for her refusal. That

mighty love he bore her, passionate though it might be, was not the kind of love which failure and disappointment can transform to hatred. He might detest his happy rival, but for Flora he had no feeling save tenderness.

She stood by the headstone, hardly daring to look up, while Dr. Ollivant moved a pace or two away from her. She was angry with him for his depreciation of Walter, but sorry for his foolish infatuation. Never before had she seen grief or passion in a man. It was like being brought face to face with some inhabitant of a strange world. Pity and wonder divided her mind.

"Flora," said a light gay voice at her elbow.

She looked round with a start and a faint cry of gladness.

"O, Walter, is it you?"

"Yes; I've had a long ramble, and come back to show you the church."

"You're very kind," replied Flora with dignity; "I've seen the church, and I'm quite ready to go back to papa."

She had forgotten his bad conduct at first, in her delight at seeing him. It had been such a relief to hear his voice, to see his frank smile, after that awful look of Dr. Ollivant's as he turned his gloomy face away from her just now.

"Then perhaps you'll show me the church. I suppose, having come here for the express purpose of seeing the place, one is in a manner bound to see it. That's the worst of a picnic; the drive is delightful, the luncheon is always agreeable; but the lion to be done afterwards is generally a bore."

"I don't think you can see the church unless you grope your way in through some door that's been left unlocked by accident. The man who keeps the keys has gone home, and he lives three miles away. He told us so."

"Communicative creature! In that case we'll consider the church done. Any remarkable monuments in the churchyard?"

"Yes, a poor little freestone cross in memory of a landscape painter whom the nation might honour with a nobler memorial," said Dr. Ollivant, looking round. "Go and look at his grave, Mr. Leyburne, and see how easily even greatness may be forgotten. His pictures fetch large sums at Christie's; but the grass grows high upon the mound under which he sleeps, upon the slope of a westward-fronting hill, in the glow of the sunsets he loved to paint."

Nothing in the doctor's calm tone indicated the struggle of the past half-hour. He possessed that heroism of daily life, the power of keeping his emotions in check. Strong must have been that spring-tide of passion which had carried away the floodgates of prudence a little while ago.

They went to look at the painter's grave, which Dr. Ollivant had discovered by chance among the humble memorials of village tradesmen and tenant farmers. The afternoon sunlight bathed the spot in its soft golden glow. It was not a bad resting-place; better perhaps, save for the credit of the nation, than Westminster Abbey.

"I should like to go back to papa, please," said Flora. "He must have finished his nap by this time."

"Then we'll go to him. How pale you are looking,

Flora!" cried the painter. "The oldest church in England has been too much for you."

"I do feel rather tired."

"Poor little fragile flower! and I have been to the top of that hill over there, and feel none the worse for the journey."

Flora and Walter went back to the wood where they had picnicked, leaving Dr. Ollivant alone in the churchyard. He was moving slowly among the turf-bound graves, an image of gloomy meditation not inappropriate to the scene.

They found Mr. Chamney seated on a pile of pine-trunks, smoking his cigar and contemplating the landscape with a look of serene thoughtfulness. He had been meditating upon that one subject which lay nearest his heart—his little girl's future. To him it seemed clear and bright enough, despite Flora's doubts. He welcomed them with a smile.

"What! you two have been together all the time, after all?"

"I have been to the other end of the world—at least to the top of that hill over there," said Walter; "and then I made a circumambulation and got back to the churchyard, but not in time to show Miss Chamney the church. Dr. Ollivant had anticipated me."

"Well, I think we'd better get off as soon as we can, if you've all had enough of Tadmor in the Wilderness. There's a high tea or something ordered for eight o'clock, isn't there, Baby?"

"Yes, papa."

"It's nearly six, and the drive takes two hours; but we won't spoil a pleasant day by hurrying the close of it. Where's Ollivant?"

"Ruminating upon the end of life among village graves. We did not presume to disturb his solemn meditations, but I know where to look for him when the wagonette's ready."

They strolled slowly through the little wood and went into the farmyard, where Flora fell in love with a mild-faced Devonian cow, ruddy as the rich soil on which she was pastured, and admired all the varieties of farmyard life with the fresh enthusiasm of a city maiden, while the horse was being harnessed.

When all was ready, they found Dr. Ollivant at the churchyard gate, serious, courteous as of old, and bearing no trace of that consuming flame which had transformed him less than an hour ago. He was more silent than usual during the homeward drive, but none the less tender in his care of Flora. Gentle was the hand with which he adjusted her shawls and wraps, lest the evening breeze should be too chill for her safety, gravely sweet his tones when he spoke to her.

Once something in the expression of his face touched her unawares. She looked up suddenly, and surprised his look of infinite love.

"Perhaps, after all, he is right," she thought, deeply moved by that revelation of despairing love. "If I had never known Walter I might have learnt to care for him, were it only out of gratitude for such deep affection. What would it have mattered to me that he is ever so many years older than I? He honours me so much the more by his regard. Yes, I might have loved him a little, I daresay, if I had never known Walter."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

*"Allez, soyez heureuse ; oubliez-moi bien vite,  
Comme le chérubin oublia le lévite  
Qui l'avait vu passer et traverser les cieux."*

THE emotions of that afternoon in Tadmor churchyard proved a little too much for Miss Chamney's strength, and she was confined to her room next morning with a severe headache. Perhaps, too, she shrank somewhat from a meeting with the doctor. All the easy familiarity of their past intercourse was over. She dreaded any allusion to that hopeless passion which gave him a new character in her mind. He was no longer the safe middle-aged friend, a kind of adopted uncle. All future companionship with him must be fraught with fear.

The morning after the picnic—disagreeably distinguished from all other mornings by Flora's absence—was spent by the three gentlemen in a somewhat desultory manner. Mr. Chamney lay on the sofa by the open window, reading yesterday's papers. The doctor went for a purposeless ramble on the cliff, intending to return at noon to write letters in the little room behind the drawing-room, which had been given up to his use. Walter went down to the beach to sketch and smoke for an hour or two, after his lazy holiday-making fashion.

The doctor walked far, following the irregular line

of the coast, across cornfield and fallow, pasture and common land. The spot where he halted was the wildest, most desolate bit of the landscape; an angle where the cliff rose highest, and the descent, although not absolutely sheer, was steep enough to make the lonely wanderer recoil from the verge with a shudder.

From this height the land sloped downward at a sharp incline and the cliff came to an end. Beyond this the coast was low and level, and a rough tract of sandy heath extended to the very edge of the sea. On the other side of this heathy waste glimmered the white walls of the coast-guard station. Dr. Ollivant lingered on the height, looking dreamily across the wide calm blue of the summer sea, and thinking whether he had not made a mistake about his life, after all.

"I have enclosed my life in too narrow a circle," he thought; "I have denied myself too many things—all those things which other men consider the necessary embellishments of existence—and now I pay the price of my onesidedness. At seven-and-thirty I am the slave of a girl, only at rest in her company—and yet not at rest even with her. A bitter end to high hopes—a barren reward for a youth of toil and patience."

It did seem a hard thing to him that he who had asked so little of Providence, who had toiled so abundantly for the prizes he had wrested from Fortune, should be denied this one boon. He only sighed for the affection of a gentle girl—not eminently beautiful, not richly gifted in mind or person; only to him the loveliest and dearest thing in the universe.

To him and to his boundless love Fate denied



her, and gave her to a man whose affection for her—even if he cared for her at all—was at best an ephemeral fancy, to be turned aside by the first temptation. The doctor had watched Walter Leyburne, and, without any knowledge of the man's life, knew enough of the man himself to be very sure that he had no absorbing love for Flora.

"But then, unhappily, she is in love with him," reflected Dr. Ollivant. "I knew that it would be so the first time I saw them together."

He walked slowly homeward. Hours were of little account to him at Branscomb. He had a volume of modern medicine—the last new ideas of Germany—in his pocket, but did not care to read to-day. For once in his life he was his own master, and tasted all the pleasures of idleness; or such pleasure as that idler tastes who walks with black Care close behind him.

The London post did not leave Branscomb till six in the evening, so there was plenty of time for the doctor to write his letters without unduly hastening his footsteps. It was between two and three when he opened the gate of the Cedars, and walked across the grass to the open window of his own little sanctum, wondering whether Flora had yet appeared, and if he had lost the delight of seeing her at luncheon. That substantial midday meal would be over most likely by this time.

He paused on the threshold of the window by which he was in the habit of going in and out, brought to a sudden standstill by the sound of one short sentence in Mark Chamney's voice. The door between

the two rooms was ajar, and Mark was speaking in tones that made every word audible.

"If I had not thought that you were fond of my little girl, I should never have broached the subject," he said.

"As if any one could help being fond of her," replied Mr. Leyburne, with the faintest suspicion of embarrassment in his accents. "It isn't possible to live with her, and see her sweet nature, and not admire and love her as—"

He had been going to say "as a sister," but the eager father interrupted him.

"As you do," he exclaimed. "I was positive of it. Haven't I seen it in a thousand signs and tokens? Didn't I tell Flora so?"

"You told her?" said the other; "and did she—"

"She was delighted. My dear fellow, she adores you. You've nothing to fear in that quarter. I think she was in love with you before I brought you into the house. I remember how bright and happy the little puss was when I told her about our meeting at Maravilla's; how she stood on tiptoe to kiss me, as if I'd done something wonderfully clever; and how she insisted upon going straight off in a cab to Covent-garden, to buy fruit and flowers to make the table look pretty. You're a happy fellow, Walter. It is not one man in a hundred who gets such a wife as Flora—a young fresh soul—pure as a little child—spontaneous—unselfish—confiding. I ought not to praise her so much, perhaps, because she's my own daughter—but—you're right, Walter—who could live with her—see her day by day, with all her unconscious graces—and not idolise her? Well, I won't

say any more about Flora. She is just what Heaven made her, untaught and unspoiled by the world. I thank God heartily for having brought us all together; for there is no one I would rather have for my son-in-law, no one to whom I would rather leave my hard-won fortune, than Jack Ferguson's nephew."

"My dear Mr. Chamney," faltered the painter, "I know not how to be grateful enough for your regard—your confidence."

"Be faithful to my child when these eyes can no longer see your love," answered Mark, after a pause in which the two men had joined hands in friendship's cordial grasp; "be kind to her and true to her when I am gone. God only knows how soon that day may come. I have had many a warning to remind me that my time is short, or I should hardly have spoken as I have to-day. I hope you don't think I make my little girl cheap by speaking out so bluntly. If I had not been certain about your feelings, I should have held my tongue. But I want to be very sure that my darling's future will be safe and happy before I lie down to take my last long rest. I may trust you, mayn't I, Walter? If I have made any mistake, if there is a shade of doubt or hesitation in your mind, speak out. I can bear my disappointment, and my little girl is made of too sound a metal to break her heart because her first love-dream may be nothing more than a dream."

"I have no doubt—no hesitation. If I have ever wavered, I shall waver no longer," exclaimed Walter with hearty eagerness, which seemed sincere even to the ear of that pale and breathless listener standing by the half-open door. "I thank you with all my

soul for your confidence," continued the young man, "and it will go hard with me if I do not prove in some measure worthy of so great a trust. God grant that you may live long enough to see that you have made no error in choosing me for the guardian of your darling's life."

All was settled. Dr. Ollivant gave one long sigh—a sigh of farewell to hope—pushed open the door, and went into the dining-room, where Mr. Chamney and Mr. Leyburne were still seated opposite each other at the luncheon table.

"I'm afraid the cutlets are cold, Ollivant," said Mark gaily, "but we'll soon get you a fresh supply. Ring the bell, Walter, like a good fellow. In the mean time, you may congratulate me, my dear doctor, upon having settled a question that lies very near my heart—a question which I have more than once discussed with you."

"You need not explain," replied the doctor. "I came in by the window of the study a few minutes ago, and heard some part of your conversation—enough to make me understand the position of affairs."

By this avowal Dr. Ollivant in some degree protected himself from the degradation of having been a listener.

"What! you overheard us?" exclaimed Mark astonished.

"Yes; I did not like to interrupt Mr. Leyburne's pretty speech just now, so waited on the other side of the door till he had finished. I congratulate you, young gentleman; and I trust you may be able to keep the promises you made so glibly."

"I am not afraid of myself," answered Walter

loftily, "however poor an opinion you may entertain of my merits. And I really do not see that Mr. Chamney's choice of a son-in-law is any business of yours. Unless, indeed," with a crushing sneer, "you had some idea of applying for the situation yourself."

"That hypothesis is not impossible," replied the doctor coolly. "But I have a better ground for my anxiety about Miss Chamney's happiness in the fact that until to-day I considered myself her future guardian."

"And so you are," cried Mark eagerly. "Don't suppose that Flora's marriage will make any difference in my wishes upon that point. I am not going to trust this inexperienced young couple with full custody of their own fortunes. Flora's money shall be tied up as tightly as lawyers can tie it; so that if Walter likes to make ducks and drakes of John Ferguson's savings, mine shall give him and his wife an income no folly of theirs can alienate. You shall be trustee to the marriage settlement. You've no objection to Dr. Ollivant in that capacity, I suppose, Walter?"

"Not the slightest; though I must needs regret that I have not been so fortunate as to earn the doctor's good opinion."

"My opinions are always liable to be modified or altered by time," said Dr. Ollivant frigidly.

He seated himself at the table, drank a glass of claret, and listened graciously while Mr. Chamney unfolded his plans for the future; Walter sitting in the verandah outside, smoking, and only putting in a word now and then.

No schoolboy enraptured by the possession of his first watch, his first gun, or his first pony, could have been more delighted than Mark at having secured a happy future for his child. He had no shadow of doubt as to the wisdom of his own plan. All seemed clear to him now. It would be hard to part with Flora, but to know her safe was to take the sting out of death.

"They can begin housekeeping in Fitzroy-square," he said; "it will only be for Walter to move his painting-room from number eleven to number nine. I'll make the house bright and pretty for them. You're right, Cuthbert, in what you once said about it; it is a gloomy den for such an occupant as Flora. I'll have the principal rooms refurnished, and keep the back drawing-room and the bedroom above it for my own hole. You won't grudge me so much space in that big house, will you, Leyburne?"

"I should be wretched if you thought of living anywhere else," said Walter, from the verandah.

"That's heartily spoken. I should be miserable if you parted me from Flora. But I'm not going to be a prying old nuisance of a father-in-law. I shall keep pretty close in my own den, and by and by you can take Flora to Italy, and show her all the wonders of the Old World. I promised myself that pleasure once. I made up my mind Baby and I would wander all over Europe together, and perhaps cross from Naples to Africa, and have a peep at the Moors. But Fate decreed otherwise. I must be content to lie at ease on my sofa, and smoke my cigar, and follow your footsteps in my dreams."

There was a pathos in his resignation all the deeper

from the cheeriness of his tone. Both his hearers were touched.

"We shall be in no hurry to leave you, sir, even for the delight of seeing Rome together," said Walter.

"We." How easily he uttered the plural pronoun; how completely settled the matter seemed! The doctor, who had despised this young man's instability of character, wondered at the change an hour had wrought in look, tone, and manner. To-day Walter Leyburne seemed steadfast as a rock.

Flora came in at this moment, pale as her white-muslin dress, and with a pensive look that went to the doctor's heart. That wild avowal of his had shaken her nerves, nay, agitated her soul to its utmost depths. She had lain awake all night thinking of him, wondering about him, haunted by that last despairing look of his, the gloomy darkness of his eyes just before he turned from her in the churchyard. He had been subdued and calm enough afterwards, but through all that long wakeful night she could not recall his face without that awful look, that fixed and sullen agony of a soul without hope.

Was this true love, the best and noblest love that could be offered to a woman? She told herself with a sigh that, if it were, she could never be truly loved by Walter Leyburne. Looking back at the past few months by the new light of that afternoon's revelation, she could see that Dr. Ollivant had always loved her better, or at least loved her more deeply, than his bright young rival. Walter had been kind enough and pleasant enough in his butterfly fashion, but Cuthbert Ollivant's devotion had known no limit. What dull evenings, what monotonous days he had

endured for her sake, knowing no weariness while she was at his side! How tender he had been towards her ignorance, how patient a teacher, how unselfish a friend!

She sighed as she recalled all his goodness—sighed with pitying tenderness, and wished there had been no such person as Walter, and that she could have rewarded that devoted love.

"I would not have minded his being so old," she said to herself. "I would have been his wife and daughter at once, and would have thought a life of duty and obedience a poor payment for his goodness to papa and me."

Unhappily Mr. Leyburne did exist, and his existence made up half the sum of Flora's narrow world.

That pale look of hers this morning thrilled Cuthbert Ollivant's soul. It told of sleeplessness and thought for his sake. Alas, she knew not that her fate had been decided in her absence. Very soon that pallor would be changed for maiden blushes, those sad eyes would brighten with a happy smile. Very soon would she have forgotten how to pity her rejected lover.

"Well, my pet, is the head better?" asked Mark Chamney, as his daughter kissed him. "I hope I sent you up a nice breakfast."

"Very nice, papa, and substantial enough for a couple of ploughmen, instead of one young lady with a headache. But I ate a few of those magnificent strawberries, and enjoyed them."

"That's right, darling. The doctor brought those in from the village on purpose for you. The basket was a perfect picture."



"Thank you, Dr. Ollivant. How kind of you!" she said, stealing a timid look at him. It was so difficult to speak to him in the ordinary careless tones, after that scene of yesterday.

"You're sure the head is better?" Mark asked anxiously, still holding his daughter's hand.

"A little, papa; yes, nearly well. I think I had too much air and sunshine yesterday. It is only the birds who can bear the full glory of a midsummer day."

"Go out and sit in the garden, Baby; it's cool on the east side of the house. Leyburne will read to you, I daresay," suggested Mr. Chamney, smiling at his own finesse. What manœuvring mother could have managed things better?

"Delighted," said Walter, flinging his half-smoked cigar into blue space towards the sea-gulls. "What shall it be—Shelley or Browning or Walt Whitman?"

"I suppose she wouldn't think it poetry if it was anything she could understand," remarked Mr. Chamney. "In my young days Byron used to be good enough for people."

"Yes," drawled Walter, "there are people still living who think there are pretty bits in Byron."

He remembered that first reading of the *Giaour* in Voysey-street, and Loo's passionate burst of weeping. That strong verse—innocent of metaphysical depths of meaning, or intricate entanglement of words—has a wonderful effect upon vulgar minds.

"O, Shelley, if you please," said Flora. She was at the age when Shelley is the most adorable of poets, when to sit in a garden above the sea, and follow the pensive meanderings of that melodious verse, is to be

in paradise. And if just the one dearest companion earth can give reads the musical lines in a low bari-tone, Shelley is twice Shelley.

She kissed her father again, looked into his face with fond anxiety, and was cheered by its gladness.

"You look so well to-day, papa," she exclaimed, "ever so much better than yesterday. Doesn't he, Dr. Ollivant?"

"I am better, my dear," replied Mark, not waiting for the doctor's opinion; "I never was better, or more at ease in my life. God bless you, darling! Go and be happy with—Shelley."

She made the doctor a little curtsey of adieu, and vanished through the open window, taking the sunlight with her, as it seemed to those two who remained in the room.

"Now, Ollivant, I daresay you are going to pitch into me," said Mark, putting himself on the defensive, as soon as Dr. Ollivant and he were alone.

"I am not going to do anything of the kind. You have done what you thought wisest for your daughter's happiness. Can I complain if she is happy?"

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## CHAPTER XVII.

"Das Ausserordentliche in dem Leben  
Hat keine Regel, keinen Zwang : es bringt  
Sich sein Gesetz und seine Tugend mit :  
Man darf es nicht mit ird'scher Wage messen ;  
Man zäumt es nicht mit ird'schen Schranken ein."

THE reading of Shelley ended as might have been foreseen by any reasonable person with full knowledge of the circumstances. Before he had gone very far into the misty labyrinth of "Epipsychidion" Walter laid down his book, took Flora's willing hand in his, and asked her to be his wife. It was all done in the simplest, easiest way. The young man indulged in no heroics—he had been a great deal more eloquent that moonlight night on the Kingston road, where the mystic light and the ghostly whisper of the pines were natural aids and incentives to poetic expression. He only told Flora in the plainest words that she was the sweetest girl he had ever known, and that he had her father's sanction for his wooing.

"More than his sanction, darling," he said; "your father wishes it with all his heart."

"But are you sure that you wish it, Walter?" asked Flora earnestly. "It is just a romantic notion of papa's that you and I ought to be married because you are Mr. Ferguson's nephew. Don't let papa's wish influence your conduct. Wait till your own heart speaks; and if that remains silent, let us be brother and sister to the end of our lives."

"My heart spoke ever so long ago; my heart has been continually speaking," said Walter, very much in earnest at this moment. He fully believed just now that he had never cared for any one but Flora—that his transient admiration of somebody else had been nothing more than an artist's worship of unconventional beauty. "Flora, you are not going to say no, when every one wishes you to say yes; you do care for me a little, don't you?" pleaded the lover.

Flora's eyes had been hidden till this moment, hidden by the shadow of her little plumed hat; but at this question she lifted her head and looked at the questioner—shyly, but with ineffable love in those clear truthful eyes.

"Yes, I knew you loved me!" said Walter, putting his arm round her with the successful suitor's proprietary air, and kissing the fresh young lips—a deliberate legitimate kiss, not like that rifled kiss in the dark lane at Thames Ditton.

"And now, darling, there is nothing to hinder our being married as soon as ever your papa likes. We might spend our honeymoon on the shores of the Mediterranean, or among the Ionian Isles, and take Mr. Chamney with us. So easy a journey as that could hardly hurt him, and he would escape the fogs and east winds of an English autumn."

Flora, whose mind was not bound up in the garments she wore, made no objection on the score of trousseau, as most modern damsels with rich fathers would have done. So these two children began to plan their future at once, seated side by side on a grassy bank sheltered by sparse laurels and scanty

firs, with all the vast blue sea spread out before them.

Dr. Ollivant bore the certainty of defeat with an external calmness which might fairly have been expected from his strong nature. He saw Flora and her lover together, knowing that they were to be together for all the years to come, and gave no sign of his agony. He was more cordial in his manner to Walter than he had ever been yet, as if he were trying his hardest to like him. To Flora he was gentle, courteous, and paternal. Seeing him as he was now, she could hardly believe that he was the same man who had pleaded his love with such passionate force in Tadmor churchyard. The Dr. Ollivant of that never-to-be-forgotten hour had vanished, like the spectral visitant of a dream. She was grateful to him for his kindness, and showed her gratitude by many little tokens of regard; but she took good care never to be alone with him, even for a few minutes, lest he should break out again. He was no longer that strong rock of shelter in which she had confided as a bulwark of defence, but a Vesuvius liable to explode at any moment.

Stoic as he might be, the doctor did not think fit to prolong the task of endurance farther than was needful to give decency to his departure. He felt that he would be better in the vault-like study in Wimpole-street, walled-in with books, feeding on the dry bones of science, or dining in the gloomy dining-room, with all the memorials of Long Sutton around him, all eloquent of his joyless boyhood, from the portrait of his father—seated at a table with a stetho-

scope and a surgical-instrument case at his elbow, and the regulation crimson curtain behind him—to the brass-bound sarcophagus in which his thrifty mother kept the decanters.

He announced his departure for the second day after that of the betrothal, much to Mark's regret.

"What a bird of passage you are, Cuthbert!" he exclaimed. "I thought you meant to stop ever so much longer!"

"My dear Chamney, you forget the impatience of patients, who get that name like the groves—a *non lucendo*. I should pass into the herd of unfashionable physicians before the year was out if I abandoned my consulting-room any longer. For the rest," he added, in a tone that was almost gay, "I shall be ready to assume any responsibility that you like to inflict upon me in regard to Miss Chamney's settlement."

"Miss Chamney!"

"Flora, if you prefer it," said the doctor, hardly daring to pronounce that name, lest his accent should betray him. He could not breathe her Christian name without a tender cadence in the syllables. "And whenever the wedding-day is fixed, you may command my attendance."

"Thanks, dear old fellow! But I'm not the less sorry to lose you now. As the distance to the goal shortens, one clings more kindly to one's travelling companions. I suppose my little girl will be married in London—at St. Pancras perhaps, a big cheerless temple for a quiet little wedding; but it will do. I daresay she'll want to buy gowns and things; what you call a trousseau. Curious that a woman about to

marry should deem it necessary to provide herself with a pile of garments as big as a haystack, as if she cherished the conviction that her husband would never give her any clothes."

"The custom is convenient, when the brokers come in within the first year of the marriage," said the doctor placidly; "it provides something to be seized, and gives tone to the statement of the husband's assets."

The next day was Dr. Ollivant's last at Branscomb, and promised to be a blank and dreary day; for Mr. Chamney had one of those intervals of prostration which were too common to him now, and Flora spent the morning by her father's sofa, reading to him or watching him in his brief and fitful slumbers.

The two visitors therefore were flung upon their own resources for amusement. The weather was divine; true midsummer weather, with a high cloudless sky, and the balmiest west wind that ever fluttered the tresses of the sea-nymphs. The doctor and Mr. Leyburne sauntered forth in a purposeless manner, and, with tacit agreement to avoid each other, took separate ways.

The painter went down to the beach to finish that little picture he was painting for Mr. Chamney. The doctor strolled through the village, took a long round inland, and returned to the coast by narrow field-paths, which led him to that wilder region which had pleased his fancy when he discovered it two days ago.

He had walked a long way before he came to the

spot where the dark red cliffs rose highest, and it was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. He had been thinking deeply, throughout that solitary ramble, doing battle with his weak heart, and he felt himself in some measure victorious in that mental struggle. It was easier to fight the battle now that all was settled—all the possibilities which exist while a question is yet undecided ended for ever. He schooled himself to think of Flora's marriage as an event that must take place very soon. He pictured to himself their future relations. He, the grave friend and adviser—guardian of her material welfare—sponsor to her first-born. He could not imagine that inevitable future without a pang; but he told himself these things must be, and that he must be less than a man if he did not face these contingencies in a manly spirit.

"To think that I, who have written on cardiac diseases, should suffer my heart to be racked by that disease called love—hopeless love for a girl of nineteen!"

At the highest point of the cliff there was a straggling hedge dividing two fields—on one side a wide sweep of fallow, on the other a stretch of feathery oats. The doctor, tired with seven or eight miles' hard walking, laid himself down to rest on a low bank under the shelter of this hedge, and had soon dozed off into that light noon-day slumber in which the hum of the summer insects, the flutter of leaves, the deep-toned murmur of the sea, are pleasantly audible to the sleeper. He hears the harmony of the universe, and fancies himself lying in the lap of Nature, soothed by her tender cradle-song.



But a harsher sound than the silver-clear note of the skylark in the blue vault above presently startled the doctor from his slumber—a voice which he knew, raised angrily, exclaiming,

“It’s a lie!”

“Is it?” asked another voice, in a still harsher tone, a voice whose quality was somewhat rough and husky, as if with too much tobacco and too much strong drink. “Where is she, then? What have you done with her? What have you done with my daughter?”

Cuthbert Ollivant started to his feet, pale and eager, and looked to see whence the voices came. Two men were walking along the edge of the cliff, a few paces in front of him. They must have passed close to him as he lay asleep under the hedge. One was Walter Leyburne; the other, a man who looked half gipsy, half seaman, roughly clad, and with a bold swaggering walk. This was all Dr. Ollivant could see as the man walked in front of him.

He followed within earshot. He had no doubt as to his justification in hearing what this stranger had to say to Walter Leyburne. He had heard enough to justify his listening to the rest.

“You have no occasion to be alarmed,” said Walter coolly; “you need give yourself no uneasiness about the daughter to whom you were so indulgent a father, so devoted a protector. She is in safe keeping.”

“Yes, I’ve no doubt of it,” answered the other, with a harsh laugh; “in uncommonly safe keeping.”

“Wherever she is, I recognise no right of yours to question me about her, or to follow her. When

you turned her out of doors that night, you forfeited all claim to her love, or duty, or obedience."

"I should never have turned her out if I hadn't had good reason for it. You can't suppose it didn't go against me, as a father, to do such a thing. There wasn't a better girl than our Loo in all Voysey-street till you came about us—industrious, hard-working, an affectionate daughter, and a thoroughly respectable young woman. But from the time you crossed her path she was ruined—lolling about with a book in her lap every spare minute she could get—sitting up late at nights, and souring the old lady's temper by burning the candles. There were plenty of people in Voysey-street to see the change, and some of 'em friendly enough to give me a word of honest advice about it. 'Are you blind, Jarred?' they said. 'Can't you see what's going on?' But even when they spoke out plain about you and Loo, it didn't frighten me. 'I know he's a noble-hearted fellow and a thorough gentleman,' said I. 'If he pays our Loo attentions that can only be paid by a lover, he means fair, and he'll make a lady of her. I'm not afraid of him. He's as true as steel.' That's what I said, Mr. Leyburne. Come now, don't prove me a liar, after all. I've travelled all the way from London to ask you a plain question. Do you mean to make an honest woman of my daughter? Are you going to marry her?"

Walter's reply was in a lower key, and the doctor was not near enough to hear it. But the stranger's answer to that speech, which seemed long and deliberate, came in a voice of thunder.

"Blackguard and profligate!" he cried, with a

threatening motion of his clenched fist. "I'll have it out of you somehow. You carry it off with a high hand, but you haven't seen the last of Jarred Gurner."

For a moment his attitude looked as if he meant violence, but in the next he turned sharply away, and ran along the cliff and down the incline that led to the sand-hills and furze-bushes by the sea. Walter had kept his ground like a rock, ready for the worst. He watched the man's vanishing figure, and then turned slowly and confronted Dr. Ollivant.

"Do you join the profession of spy to your more orthodox avocations, Dr. Ollivant?" he asked, after a movement of surprise.

"I am glad to say that I heard every syllable your companion spoke to you after you passed that hedge," replied the doctor.

"I congratulate you upon having acquired so much enlightenment about my affairs."

"I have learned just this much about you—enough to justify me in using my strongest endeavours to prevent your marriage with Flora Chamney."

"What, you mean to interfere, do you! Not content with putting your grip upon the young lady's fortune, you want to get the young lady herself. Do you think I haven't seen your drift from the first? And you would like to avail yourself of a disreputable ruffian's random charge in order to set Mr. Chamney against me? A clever game, Dr. Ollivant."

"I repeat what that man said to you, blackguard and profligate," cried the doctor, livid with anger. He knew not that in his rage there was any more

personal feeling than righteous indignation against a hardened and heinous sinner. "From the first I have known you to be unworthy of Miss Chamney. I have known you to be fickle and unstable—blowing hot and cold; but so long as I knew no more against you than this, I held my tongue. Do you think I shall be silent now—now that I know you varied your courtship of Miss Chamney by the seduction of a humbler victim? No liar, no seducer shall marry Mark Chamney's daughter, while I have breath to denounce him."

Walter had heard Mr. Gurner's abuse with supreme indifference; but Dr. Ollivant's reproaches stung him keenly. This last insult seemed the culmination of a series of wrongs. The doctor had been his secret foe from the first: had underrated his talents, denied his genius, been his silent and stealthy competitor for Flora's love. That word "liar" was just too much for mortal patience. Walter raised the light cane he carried, and brought it down within an inch of Dr. Ollivant's face. Then all Cuthbert Ollivant's secret jealousy and hatred—the smothered fire that had consumed his breast so long—blazed out. The doctor seized his assailant with the grip of a tiger.

"I repeat what I have said," he cried. "Liar, seducer, charlatan! You shall never be Flora's husband!"

The words came hoarsely from those breathless lips—came in the midst of a scuffle. The doctor wrestled, the painter made free use of his fists. For some moments Walter had the best of it, till, feeling himself losing ground, the doctor called science to his aid, and planted a blow on his antagonist's temple,

which sent Walter reeling backwards, helpless and unconscious. Reeling backwards on the sunburnt slippery sward that edged the cliff—backwards until, with a wild cry of horror, the doctor saw him sink below the verge. Cuthbert Ollivant stood on the cliff alone, staring into space, convulsed by the horror of that moment. Could his outstretched arm have saved a life? Had he, the man of iron nerve, failed in this one dread crisis in the common attribute of presence of mind?

He stepped close to the edge and looked down. The red rough earth was loosened and broken, and a good deal of it had fallen with the falling man. There he lay at the foot of the cliff, half buried in that loose red clay, barely a distinguishable object from the height whence Dr. Ollivant beheld him.

“Dead, of course,” thought the doctor with a pang.

He hurried down the incline of the cliff; it took him a long way from that prostrate figure, yet was his only road to the beach—his only way of getting to the place where Walter lay. Halfway down the descent he met the stranger running to meet him.

“How did it happen?” he asked.

“Is he dead?” cried the doctor.

“Dead as Nebuchadnezzar. How did he fall? Did you pitch him over?” demanded Jarred in the most friendly manner, as if to throw a young man over a cliff was one of those errors to which the best of natures are liable.

“We had a scuffle; he attacked me, not I him. I held my ground as long as I could without striking him. Then finding he was savage enough to do me serious harm, I gave him a blow on the temple that

stunned him. He reeled backwards; the grass is slippery—”

“Yes,” interrupted Jarred coolly; “that’s the wisest way of putting it.”

“What do you mean, fellow? I have told you nothing but the truth.”

“It would ill become me to say you haven’t,” replied Jarred apologetically; “but coroners and jury-men have more speculative minds than mine; they will go into probabilities, and they might take it into their heads to disbelieve that account of yours. They might call this little business manslaughter; or, if they happened to be a pigheaded lot of country shop-keepers, murder.”

“They can call it what they choose. I can only tell them the same story I have told you. Let me pass, if you please; I want to see if there is anything to be done for that young man.”

“Yes, there’s a coffin to be made for him, and an inquest to be held upon his remains. That’s about all, I believe; unless you mean to give him the luxury of a tombstone.”

“How do you know that he is dead?” asked the doctor irresolutely. Curious and intricate questions were beginning to revolve themselves in his mind. It would not be a nice thing to stand accused of this young man’s death—to find his truthful statement of facts scouted as the veriest fable. But worse than trial by jury, or the pains and penalties of the law, would be Flora’s loathing—Flora, who would believe him the assassin of her lover—the desolator of her glad young life.

“How do I know that he is dead!” echoed Jarred scornfully. “By all the signs and tokens of death—

glazing eyes, a heart that has stopped beating, livid lips. Do you suppose he had any chance of life—as much as one in a million—when he fell over that cliff? Come, now, sir, you take my advice—I'm a man of the world—a man who has been knocked about by the world, and who knows how blessed ready the world is to drop down upon a man, if once he puts himself in the wrong—take my advice, and keep this business as quiet as you can. It's uncommonly lonely about here, and I don't think there's much chance of people passing along the beach before the tide is in; it'll be close up to the cliff in a quarter of an hour, I should think, by the look of it. Once the tide is in, you're safe. The body may be brought in by another tide, or picked up at sea; but there'll be nothing to connect you with the body."

"There's nothing to connect me with it now," said the doctor thoughtfully—he was evidently impressed by Jarred's suggestion—"except humanity."

"But there'll be plenty of evidence against you, if you go down yonder and potter about, trying to bring the dead back to life."

"Why are *you* so concerned for my safety?" asked Dr. Ollivant. "You, who are a stranger to me."

"Out of common humanity; or, if you don't think that motive strong enough for a man of the world, I'll go a step farther, and confess that I should be glad to do a service for a gentleman who may be able to serve me in return. I'm a friendless vagabond, and wouldn't stick at a trifle to do a friendly turn to a man who could be grateful for a kindness."

"Suppose I refuse your intervention, not seeing my need of your help?"

"In that case, I shall tell my own story about that

young man's death; and it may not happen to be quite so favourable to the idea of your innocence as your own account of the business."

"You mean that you would swear to a lie to get me hung!"

"By no means. I should only describe what I saw and heard from the beach just now. How I heard voices—yours raised in anger; heard you declare that Mr. Leyburne should not marry Miss Chamney while you had power to prevent him. I'll swear to that speech through thick and thin. Then came hurried footsteps on the cliff above me, like the steps of struggling men, one of them fighting for his life; and then I saw Walter Leyburne hurled over the edge of the cliff. He fell, almost at my feet, stone dead. All the cross-questioning of all the Old-Bailey lawyers at the bar wouldn't make me alter a syllable of that statement."

A damaging statement for Dr. Ollivant assuredly, and difficult of disproof. There was so large an element of truth in it.

"Come," said Jarred, reassuming his friendly air, as if he had known the doctor twenty years, and had always been attached to him, "you'd better treat the business like a man of the world. It was an unlucky slip, and you're very sorry for it; but there's no use in crying over spilt milk. Ten minutes more, and the tide will be up; and before an hour is over, that poor young fellow will be carried out to sea quietly and comfortably. You go home to your friends, Dr. Ollivant, the quicker the better, so that you may be in a position to prove an alibi if Mr. Leyburne should have been seen about the cliffs by any one."



"How came you to know my name?" asked the doctor suspiciously.

"I've heard it many a time. I was a friend of young Leyburne's till he led my daughter wrong, and I know all about you and the young lady in Fitzroy-square. I've been living in Branscomb village for the last two days, waiting for a quiet opportunity to speak to my young gentleman; and I've seen you all together. Come, there's no time to lose. I must run back to the beach and watch. You're going home, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose that's the best thing I can do, since there's nothing to be done for—him," pointing towards the beach. "You can call on me in Wim-pole-street some day, and claim payment for your silence."

Jarred ran back to the beach as fast as his feet could carry him. The doctor glanced seaward with a thoughtful eye. The tide was rolling in, but not so fast as Jarred had asserted; it would be an hour yet before that spot where the prostrate figure lay among the crumbled earth would be covered by deep water.

The doctor looked at his watch—not yet four o'clock. Great heaven, how brief the time since he had lain down to rest under the hedge, and how the whole aspect of his life was changed by that one hour!

There was no such person in the world as Walter Leyburne. That question which he had so often asked himself—which he had asked of Flora—whether he might not have won her save for this rival—must now be answered by the future. Death had cleared the ground for him. It was for him to make good use of his opportunity.

He walked homeward, heavily burdened with care

yet with a guilty joy in the thought that the marriage he had dreaded could never take place—that he should never be called upon to bless Walter Leyburne's wife.

He loved too strongly to be merciful or even just. In his heart of hearts he was glad of that fatal chance which had ended the painter's brief day of betrothal.

"It was his own fault," he thought. "I was not to be felled like an ox by the mere brute force of a detected scoundrel. He knew he was guilty, and that made my reproaches hit all the harder. Thank God I overheard that conversation, and discovered the fellow's worthlessness before it was too late to save Flora! Thank God even for his awful death, if that alone could save her from alliance with a profligate."

It seemed to Cuthbert Ollivant that the direct action of Providence was visible in all that had happened. Hardly anything less than Walter Leyburne's death would have cured Flora's infatuation. The strongest evidence that could have been brought before her would have failed to convince her of his unworthiness. To her he would ever remain the splendid abstraction of a girl's first love-dream—as incapable of any wrong deed as that cold perfection, a statue, is incapable of descending from its pedestal.

But he was gone! She might give him her tears, her regrets—enshrine him in the temple of her memory—but she could not give him herself. There was boundless comfort in that thought. New hope sprung up—a Titan; not that feeble hope of the past. Dr. Ollivant forgot how much longer a woman grieves for the love she has lost untimely than for the love she has won and worn out, like a threadbare garment—till the vanishing of the silken woof reveals the coarser thread of the warp.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Look not thus pleadingly on me! The tears  
Thou sheddest in thy bitterest grief are joy  
Beside my tearlessness."

It was half-past five when Dr. Ollivant came in sight of the sugarloaf roof of the Norman tower. The summer afternoon was softly melting into summer evening—a brighter gold upon the waves, a deeper purple in the distance—a warm rosy light over beach and village; the forerunner of sunset's glory and glow. All Nature's voices seemed to have a mellower sound just at this hour; and Dr. Ollivant, to whose observation evening in Wimpole-street rarely offered any more interesting features than the six-o'clock postman, or the brougham of a rival practitioner over the way, was moved by the soft influence of the scene.

"At such an hour as this one would think that Nature meant all men to be good," he mused; "but then, Nature belies herself as often as mankind. Yonder restful sea will have her fit of wickedness—savage winds will come tearing over those peaceful hills; Nature will indulge her bad passions just like the weakest of us."

The doctor looked back along the summer waves. Somewhere under that blue water Walter Leyburne was swaying gently to and fro, entangled among seaweeds perhaps, and with cold anemones cleaving to

his hair, lullabied as gently by that soft murmur of ocean as ever his mother rocked him in her arms. To-night or to-morrow might come wind and storm, and the same waters would tear and buffet him, and shatter him against the rocks in their frantic sport; but for this evening, he could scarcely have a pleasanter resting-place than that cool blue sea.

"Better than to be stretched in a narrow coffin, and shut up in a room that all living things avoid," thought the doctor.

Death had been so familiar to him that his rival's swift passage from life to eternity impressed him less than it might have impressed another man. The universal doom was always before his mind, under more or less painful aspects. That a man should have fallen from a cliff was hardly worse than that he should be cut off by fever or consumption. Yet little more than an hour ago he had been weak and plastic as a child in the hands of Jarred Gurner. The cold drops of a deadly fear had stood upon his brow at the thought that, if Jarred gave his version of the scene on the cliff, Flora would believe him a murderer. What would she not believe in her distraction, if the knowledge of her lover's untimely fate came to her in its dreadful certainty?

A figure was standing at the garden-gate—the slender form he knew so well, in its flowing muslin dress, with gay blue ribbons fluttering here and there—not a toilet that carefully followed the last turn in Fashion's ever-revolving wheel, but a simple girlish dress, careless, unsophisticated, with only a school-girl's aspiration for the beautiful as embodied in a blue sash and breast-knot.

As he drew nearer, he saw the fair young face watching him with an anxious look.

"How late you are, Dr. Ollivant!"

"Am I? I hope your father has not wanted me—has not grown worse?"

"No; thank God, he is better. What have you done with Walter?"

The question electrified him. How like a murderer he felt just at this moment—how like the first murderer when the same awful question was addressed to him! And yet by no deliberate design had he compassed his rival's death.

An unlucky blow—given in self-defence—that was all.

"What have I done with him?" he echoed, forcing a smile. "We have not been together. I expected to find him with you."

Once on the fatal road, lies came glibly enough. He had an appointed part to act, and must play it boldly.

"Did you?" said Flora, with a disappointed look. "I have not seen him since breakfast. He said he was only going out for an hour or two, while I read the paper to papa. It isn't very kind of him to stay away so long. I waited luncheon till past three, and couldn't eat anything then. And how faint he must be—so many hours after breakfast! Artists are so absent-minded. But you are looking pale and tired, Dr. Ollivant; come into the drawing-room and have some sherry-and-soda," added Flora, remembering the duties of hospitality.

"I am tired; I've been a longer round than usual among those hills on the road to Tadmor in the

Wilderness," said the doctor, remembering Jarred's suggestion about an alibi.

"And alone all the time?" exclaimed Flora wonderingly. She could not understand the delight of such solitary rambles.

"Alone—with my own thoughts—and the image I chose for my companion."

They went into the drawing-room; a shadowy retreat, with close-drawn venetians, save to one window which looked away from the sun, across darkening purple waves, to the distant rocks of Fairbay. Flora had contrived to beautify the barely-furnished room with flowers and bookstands and gay little work-baskets, and prettinesses of an essentially girlish character. The canaries were there in their big cage, chirping placidly now and then, as if they meant to think seriously about singing before the summer was over. The doctor cherished a secret conviction that they were all hens, and that Flora, who had chosen them for the brilliancy of their colour and the showiness of their paces, had been deceived as to their vocal capacities. To-day the doctor had no eye for the canaries or the prettinesses of that cool retreat, where Mark Chamney reposed luxuriantly on his sofa by the one unshrouded window. He had eyes only for Flora's face, wondering how it would look as time went by and brought no tidings of her lover—how it would look if they had to tell her he was drowned.

Mr. Chamney spoke to him, and he answered reasonably enough; yet, if questioned the moment after, would have been sorely puzzled to tell what he had been talking about. Never had Flora been kinder to him than this afternoon. She made him sit in the

easy-chair opposite her father's sofa, poured the wine into his tumbler, even opened the soda-water bottle herself, with dexterous fingers.

"I learnt to do it for papa in Fitzroy-square," she explained, proud of her proficiency. "When I was at Miss Mayduke's I should have thought opening a soda-water bottle as awful as firing a cannon."

She seemed cheered by the doctor's return, as if it presaged Walter's speedy coming.

"I daresay he has walked as far as you," she said.

"'He' meaning Walter, of course," cried Mark, laughing. "What curious people lovers are! That poor child has been going in and out of this window every five minutes, fluttering like a frightened bird, standing at the garden-gate to look up and down the road, and then coming back to me with the saddest little face—'No, papa, not a sign of him.' What an exacting wife you'll make, Baby, and what a stay-at-home husband you'll expect!"

"I don't suppose husbands stay at home always, papa," replied Flora, pouting. "I'm not quite so ignorant as you think. But I thought when people were engaged, they generally spent a good deal of their time together, just to see if it answered."

"If the engagement answered?"

"Yes, if they really, really liked each other. For, you see, a gentleman may make a lady an offer on the impulse of the moment—Walter is very impulsive, you know, papa—and he may find out afterwards that he doesn't care about her as much as he thought he did. His engagement gives him plenty of time for that; for if he and his betrothed are a good deal together for long, long hours, he must know for certain if he is

quite happy in her company, and never, never dull or tired of her; and if she can really be all the world to him—as a wife ought to be.”

“A very good definition of the uses of courtship, Flora. When Walter goes for his next long walk, you shall go with him, and see how your pretty little feet can adapt themselves to his pace—walking the journey of life by his side.”

Dr. Ollivant looked at the purpling sea, and thought where this Walter really was of whom those two spoke so gaily.

“What time do we dine, Baby?” asked Mr. Chamney, after an interval in which Flora had been out into the garden for another look along the road.

“The usual time, papa—seven.”

“You’d better go and get rid of the dust of your walk, Cuthbert. It’s past six—and your toilet is always such a scrupulous business.”

The doctor started from a reverie.

“Yes,” he said, when Mr. Chamney had repeated his observation, “I’ll go. I’m up to my eyes in dust. That red earth on the cliffs—”

“Why, you said you had been on the hills—”

“I mean on the hills. The soil is all the same colour—red, like blood.”

He went up to his room. The sight of his own face in the glass startled him.

“I look like a murderer,” he said to himself. “The mark is there already. Come, if I don’t keep a better watch over myself, they’ll find out the truth from my face.”

Copious ablutions in cold spring-water helped to obliterate the mark. Carefully brushed, well-made even-



ing clothes assisted in erasing the brand. No murderer could have wished to look better than Dr. Ollivant looked as he entered the drawing-room, where Flora was watching so wearily for the faithful knight who came not.

Pale always, thoughtful always, the burden on his mind made no change in his aspect. To his own eye there might be a guilty look, but the guilt was within, and the sinner's imagination invented its outward tokens. The eye sees what the mind invents.

Perhaps the worst feature of his hideous secret was that it urged him to perpetual lies. Just now, seeing Flora's watchful look, he was constrained to say,

"Not come yet? He's late, isn't he?"

"Very late. I asked them to keep back dinner for a quarter of an hour. I hope you don't mind. You must be very hungry."

"Must I? Why?"

"Because you have had no luncheon."

"Haven't I? No, to be sure. I forgot."

"What a bad appetite you must have to be able to forget your luncheon!"

"I don't know. Luncheon seems rather a lady's meal—like five-o'clock tea, and all those extra refreshments. I don't know that men would not thrive better if they were fed like dogs, and wild beasts in Zoological Gardens, once a day. Nature would adapt herself to the system."

"How dreadful! As if life could possibly go on without meals. It isn't that I care so much about eating, but it is so nice to sit at a table with people one likes, and talk in the leisurely way people talk at meals. Surely meals are the bond of society."

"I suppose so; but you see I don't care for society. It seems rather a hardship to me sometimes to be obliged to sit at table with my mother for an hour and a half, while our old servant dawdles in and out with vegetable-dishes, and brushes away crumbs, and polishes glasses, and changes spoons and forks, and lays out figs and oranges and dry biscuits that we never eat, when I should get as much sustenance from a mutton-chop swallowed in ten minutes."

"I'm afraid you're a misanthrope, Cuthbert," said Mark from his sofa. "You'd rather sit in that dreary consulting-room of yours, with some musty old book before you, than enjoy the best society earth can give."

"I beg your pardon; there is some society for which I would surrender all my books—light the fires of the Turkish baths with them—obliterate from my mind all the knowledge they ever gave me—begin life afresh, ignorant as a child."

"Why, Cuthbert, you talk as if you were in love!" cried Mark, laughing. "Come, little girl, I think we've given this young man grace enough. You had better ring for dinner. I daresay Walter has come across people he knows, and is dining somewhere."

"But he doesn't know any one in Devonshire."

"How can you be sure of that? He may have met some roving acquaintance—some brother of the brush."

"I won't keep you waiting any longer, papa; nor you, Dr. Ollivant. But it does seem so strange, so rude and unkind, to stay away without sending any message. And he has never kept us waiting before. O papa, if something should have happened!"

"Why, Baby, what could happen amiss to a strong young man with all his senses about him? You mustn't look so miserable at a few hours' separation, little one, or I shall wish I had never picked up this young scapegrace."

"It isn't that, papa. If I could only feel sure that he is safe."

"I wish I were as sure the forequarter of lamb won't be spoilt by this foolish delay. Come, Ollivant, give Flora your arm."

They sat down to dinner, but a cloud was upon them. Flora's absent looks, her listening expectant air, disturbed both her companions. Mark could not be happy while his daughter was anxious. This first cloud—light as it might be—filled him with uneasiness. What if his fancied wisdom had been foolishness after all? What if Cuthbert were right, and this young painter really inconstant and unstable? He slighted his betrothed by this unexplained absence. He had no right to cause her alarm by some frivolous change of plan.

They lingered at the dinner-table; Flora doing her utmost to protract the ceremony, in the hope that Walter would be with them before they had finished; and then giving particular instructions for fish and joint being kept hot, in case of Mr. Leyburne's return. It was past nine when they went back to the drawing-room, where one lamp burned with a pensive light remote from the open window.

Here they sat in almost absolute silence; Flora on a footstool at her father's feet, looking up at the starlit sky, and waiting for the first token of Walter's return. Mark lying back in his arm-chair, with one

hand resting tenderly on his daughter's silky hair; the doctor seated on the other side of the window, looking out with his straight steadfast gaze. Even the consciousness of guilt could not make those calm eyes shifty.

With every rise and fall of the waves he thought of the cold form they carried in their lap to-night. *It* rose and fell with that gaily-lifting water—*it* moved with every ripple—he could almost fancy he heard the dragging sound of the heavy body over its ocean-bed—the grating of the pebbles—as the sea drew it along, bound by the long slimy weeds; the cold dank weeds which by this time must clothe it like a garment.

And all this time Flora watched and listened as if he could come back to her.

Midnight came while they were still sitting in patient silence, but they sat on even later, until it seemed unreasonable to expect Mr. Leyburne's return.

"He must have had some unforeseen summons back to London," said Mark, who had beguiled the slow hours with occasional slumbers.

"Who could send for him, papa? He has not a relation in the world, or at least not one he cares for."

"Pshaw! all young men have bosom-friends. Some brother artist in distress may have appealed to him, and he has hurried off to his friend's assistance. You know how impulsive he is. Your geniuses are not to be judged by common rules. I daresay we shall have a letter or a telegram to-morrow."

"God grant we may!" said Flora piteously; "but I am afraid something has happened—some misfor-

tune. I don't think he would leave us so unkindly. Dr. Ollivant," turning to him with earnest appeal, "what do you think? Is there any need for fear?"

She looked at him entreatingly, as if she would have besought the strong man for comfort. The poor little face looked white and wan in the sickly flare of the candle she was holding, as she paused on the threshold for some word of hope. That look of hers rent Cuthbert Ollivant's heart. Not even the sweet hope of winning her by and by could counter-balance the agony of that one pang—to see her thus and know the suffering that awaited her. The slow days of hope deferred—the dull anguish of uncertainty—or, if the sea gave up her dead, the horrible truth.

He could not answer her with a lie.

"Alas, dear Flora, life is made up of fears and sad surprises. I—I am inclined to think there must be something wrong."

Mark Chamney turned upon him indignantly.

"It's too bad of you to talk like that, Ollivant, when my little girl is as nervous as she can be, and has been making herself positively wretched about this scapegrace, who is enjoying himself somewhere or other, I daresay."

Dr. Ollivant shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"It is always wise to be prepared for the worst," he said. "I didn't say there was anything amiss. I only said there might be."

"Yes, you're like one of those confounded Greek oracles we used to read about at school, who were

never wrong, because they were never clear. You sha'n't frighten my Flora with your dark speeches."

"Let her take comfort from the thought that she has you by her side," said the doctor gently; "that's the best comfort I can offer her."

"And that is comfort!" exclaimed Flora. "O papa, papa, can I complain so long as I have you?"

She threw herself into her father's arms, and shed the first tears of her new grief upon his breast.

"If he has deserted me," she said in a low broken voice, "I can bear it."

"Deserted you, my pretty one! Do you think you are the kind of sweetheart a young man would run away from?" cried the father soothingly.

Dr. Ollivant stood in the shadow and witnessed her grief. It was hard to bear, remembering that one fatal blow into which he had put all the force of his manhood.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

"If he lived,  
She knew not that he lived; if he were dead,  
She knew not he was dead."

THE next day—and the next—and a week of slow and weary days went by, and brought no news of the missing man. There was no letter—there was no telegram. The inquiries which Mr. Chamney set on foot round and about threw no light on the mystery. Every one about Branscomb remembered the young painter; almost every one had seen him; many had spoken to him on that last day; but since a little after noon on that day no eye in Branscomb had beheld him. He had been seen to shut up his paint-box and portfolio, to give them in charge to a boy for safe conveyance to the villa, and then to go up the hill yonder towards the cliffs, smoking his cigar.

Only one of Mr. Chamney's informants had anything to add to this simple statement. This was an idle young fisherman, who rarely seemed to do anything more actively laborious than watching other people work. This youth affirmed that soon after the painter went up the hill—it might have been ten minutes, it might have been pretty nigh a quarter of an hour—he had seen a strange-looking party in a velveteen jacket and a billycock hat come out of the Blue Lion public and mount the hill, in the same

direction, as it might be following Mr. Leyburne. He had took particular notice of this party, being a stranger. That was all.

The emergence of this velveteen-jacketed stranger from the Blue Lion, and even his ascent of the hill, were hardly circumstances forcible enough to point to any direct conclusion. Walter was young and strong—not the kind of man to fall a prey to any prowling vagabond—a man whom prowling vagabonds would be likely to avoid. He carried little money about him, and, except a good chronometer, offered small temptation to the footpad. Mr. Chamney therefore paid little attention to the young fisherman's remarks about the peculiar-looking character in velveteen and felt hat.

Dr. Ollivant, touched with pity for Flora's distress, postponed his departure, at the hazard of his professional interests, and was the moving spirit of the investigation. He did not waste time upon discussion, but went over to Long Sutton, and set the telegraph at work. He telegraphed to the landlady in Fitzroy-square—answer paid. He telegraphed to Walter Leyburne's shipping friends in the City, and waited at the station till both messages had been answered.

The reply was the same in each case; neither the landlady nor the shipbroker had heard or seen anything of Mr. Leyburne since the 30th of June—the date of that scene on the cliff.

What other answer could Dr. Ollivant have expected? He folded the messages, and went back to Branscomb to show them to Mr. Chamney and his daughter.

Flora turned from him with a sigh.

"How could you expect to hear of him in Lon-



don?" she said. "He has either met with his death in some dreadful way down here, or he has run away from me."

The last possibility was almost as bitter as the first, and it was a possibility that occurred to poor Flora very often.

Had he really loved her, or had he been influenced by her father's too obvious desire for their union? That doubt humiliated her. Fear of his untimely death, shame at the thought that he had perhaps deserted her, that his disappearance was only a trick to rid himself of an unloved betrothed, divided her mind; and the double burden was too heavy for her to bear. Before the week was ended she was lying in her airy white-curtained bedchamber, languid and ill.

"What is to be done?" asked Mark Chamney in an agony of fear.

"We must get her back to London. The journey won't do her any harm—she is not ill enough for that. But if she stays here, and listens to the moaning of that sea—here, where everything will remind her of her missing lover—I won't answer for her health of mind or body. Again, if he should be drowned, and the sea give him up to us—! Such a shock as that might be fatal."

"Do you think he is drowned?" asked Mark despondently.

"It seems the most likely. Something must have happened to him. What more likely than that he was going to find some lonely nook to bathe in, that time he was seen going up the path towards the cliffs? There's that gully about a quarter of a mile from here, where there's a tempting bit of sand. He may

have gone down there for a swim. You know how fond he was of the water."

"Yes, but he was a splendid swimmer."

"You've only his own word for that," responded the doctor. "All men fancy themselves great swimmers. It's one of the common weaknesses of humanity. Besides, splendid swimmers do sometimes come to a bad end."

"True," sighed Mark. "Poor Walter; I can't bear to think that he is really gone. Strange mockery of Fate! I thought I had made my child's future safe and happy when I gave her that young man for her protector. Yet he goes before me. I knew that I was doomed. How could I think that the doom was upon him too?"

Dr. Ollivant had been watchful of the sea during this last week. He had supplied himself with all the local papers, and studied all paragraphs relating to the drowned. The waves gave up no less than three victims on the western coast during this period, and Dr. Ollivant travelled many miles to inspect these mournful remains. But none of those three drowned men bore the faintest resemblance to Walter Leyburne; and the dismal inspection over, the doctor went back to Branscomb somewhat relieved in mind.

Perhaps the sea meant to keep his secret altogether. Again and again had he pondered his conduct on that fatal day—his seeming weakness in accepting Jarred Gurner's silence—a silence which would have to be paid for by and by. He knew well enough that in permitting this man to befriend him—to stand between him and the law—he had sunk below the level of his former life. Straightforwardness, man-

liness would have urged him to stand the brunt of what he had done; to tell his own story, and hazard all consequences.

But against this there was the fact that the truth, tell it how he might, meant ruin. He must confess that angry scuffle—confess that deadly blow. Where would his professional status be after such a revelation? What would be his chance with Flora? To speak the truth was to lose all; and the truth could not help the dead.

Thus, after prolonged deliberation, he told himself that if there had been ever so much time for consideration, he could hardly have decided otherwise. That strange vagabond had summed-up the exigences of his case wisely enough. To potter over the dead man, to be found beside him, would have been ruin. His present position was mean, despicable. Granted; but he had been obliged to chose between that degradation and the loss of all he valued.

The week stretched to ten days, and Mr. Chamney was no wiser as to Walter's fate. Flora grew worse; increasing languor, increasing disinclination to live. She had no fever. Delirium did not drift her fancies out of the real world into a region of distorted shadows. She only turned her face to the wall, refused meat and drink, hardly answered even when her father spoke to her—seemed to be slipping gently out of life.

Dr. Ollivant counselled removal from Branscomb; she had just enough strength for the journey; but in a little while it would be too late.

"You mustn't take her back to Fitzroy-square," he said; "everything would remind her of Mr. Ley-

burne. You ought to take some nice rooms out at Kensington, where the world would look fresh and bright to her. A delicate flower like that will only flourish under certain conditions of atmosphere."

"I'll do anything you like," answered Mark helplessly; "only don't let me lose her. I didn't think loss could come near me, who have so short a time to live; yet now it seems as if my brief span may be long enough to outlast all I love."

"Don't be downhearted, Mark; you shall see our pretty flower bloom again. Shall I telegraph to my mother, and tell her to get you some nice rooms near Kensington Gardens before two o'clock to-morrow? She'll do anything I ask her."

"Do, Ollivant. We'll travel to-morrow if you think it wise."

"I look upon it as our only hope of rousing her. She won't leave off grieving, of course, for some time to come; but one great incentive to grief, the scenes which recall her lost lover, will be removed."

The doctor rode over to Long Sutton, and despatched his telegram; so carefully worded, so full of precautions to secure his patient's comfort and well-being. The rooms were to be cheerful and airy, with a southern aspect, if possible; within five minutes' walk of Kensington Gardens; brightly furnished; not the usual dismal lodging-house pattern. Mrs. Ollivant would have hard work to find such model apartments.

When the intended journey was announced to Flora, there came a difficulty. The girl rose up in her bed with newly-awakened vitality, and turned angrily upon the doctor.

"What," she exclaimed, "leave Branscomb before

we know what has become of Walter! I did not think you were so cruel, Dr. Ollivant."

"Do you think I have been wanting in my efforts to find him, Flora?" asked the doctor.

"I don't know; it is too soon to give up; it would be heartless to go away and leave him to perish, lost perhaps on some dreary moor or in some wood. The people here will take no trouble when we are gone."

"Let me say a few words to her alone," said the doctor, appealing to Mark, who stood at the foot of the bed watching his daughter with a countenance of despair.

He obeyed his old schoolfellow without a word, and slipped quietly from the room, but only to the landing outside, where he waited the issue of events.

"Shall I tell you the truth, Flora?" asked Dr. Ollivant, when they were alone.

"Of course; what do I want but the truth?" she answered impatiently, those eyes that were wont to be all softness bright with anger.

"Then, believe me, all has been done that can be done. If we were to stay here a year, and spend all your father's fortune upon the search, we could do no good. Every reasonable inquiry has been made, in every direction. Either Mr. Leyburne has gone away of his own accord; or the sea has swallowed him up. The latter seems to me the more likely event."

"Why did I ever wish him to come here!" said Flora. "It was my fault for being so anxious to have him here. And he came to his death!"

"Flora," said the doctor, taking the burning little

hand, "was Mr. Leyburne the only person you ever loved?"

"How can you ask me such a question, when there is papa, whom I love with all my heart?"

"Do you? And yet you behave as if the world had only held Walter Leyburne—as if your father's anxiety, your father's grief, were indifferent to you. You lie upon this bed, and turn your face to the wall, and give yourself up to despair, because one man has gone out of the world, forgetting that you are breaking your father's heart—that you are killing him."

"Dr. Ollivant, how can you say so?" cried Flora, startled.

"I only tell you the truth. You know that your father is ill; that with him life is held by a feeble thread; but you do not know how ill he is, or how attenuated that thread of life. The whole bitter truth has hitherto been mercifully kept from you. But now it is time you should know the worst. For your father's complaint, grief or anxiety of any kind is full of danger."

"What is my father's complaint? Tell me the worst."

"Chronic heart-disease."

Flora cast herself, sobbing, on the pillows. Her lost lover was forgotten; the shadow of that deeper, greater loss darkened her narrow world. A dull dead feeling of despair came upon her. Was she doomed to lose all—she for whom a fortnight ago life had seemed all brightness?

"Is there no cure?" she asked at last, raising herself again from the pillows, and turning to the doctor

with streaming eyes. "You who are so clever, you can surely cure him."

"The age of miracles is past, Flora, and nothing less than a miracle could cure your father. He knows that as well as I know it. What I can do by care and treatment to prolong his life I will do, you may be very sure of that; but the course you have taken during the last ten days is calculated to undo all the good I can do—nay, more than that, is likely to have a fatal effect."

"O, how wicked I have been, not to think more of my father—the first and dearest in the world—my father, whom I love better than life!"

"Your grief has agonised him. Your refusal to eat—your silence—your obstinate determination not to be comforted, even by him—think how these must have tortured him. Every pang you make that weak heart suffer brings him one step nearer to the end."

"O, I have been out of my senses," cried Flora; "how else could I have been forgetful of my father! I thank you, Dr. Ollivant, even for telling me the worst," she went on, choked with tears. "It has been a hard blow; but better than ignorance—better than false security. My dear, dear father! He shall never more be pained by any selfish grief of mine, so long as God spares him to me. I will make his repose, his happiness, the single study of my life. O Dr. Ollivant, be careful of him—prolong his life."

"Be sure I will do my uttermost, Flora. Shall I call your father in again?"

"Yes."

She dried her tears hurriedly. Mark saw no trace

of her grief as he came beside her bed and bent down to kiss her.

"Dr. Ollivant has been scolding me, papa," she said, with something of her old bright way, "and I mean to behave better in future. I will go back to London to-morrow, if you like."

"Ollivant thinks it will be better for you, darling."

"I will do whatever is best for you—whatever you wish, papa. And now, if you'll send Jane to me, I think I'll get up, and come down-stairs and sit with you while you dine."

"Will you really, my pet?" cried Mark, delighted; "that will make me quite happy again."

Mr. Chamney and the doctor withdrew, and presently Flora rose from the bed where she had cast herself in her despair, with a wicked hope that she might never rise from it again. She let the house-maid dress her, and smooth-out the tangled brown hair, and put on the blue ribbons which she had worn for Walter's gratification. He had made a little water-colour sketch of her in those very ribbons. And now she was going back to a world in which there was no Walter Leyburne. She would hear of painters and of pictures, and of all life's brightest things, and know that he had no more part in them; he who had been so ambitious, and had hoped to conquer kingdoms in that wide world, the future. The sun came streaming in upon her from the open window; there lay the blue bright sea—the sea which perhaps was his grave—the very fairness of this world, upon which she had turned her back for the last blank miserable week, made it hateful to her. Such a smiling deceptive world full of sorrow and death.



one companion, and at Millbank no one could have looked down upon her.

Here she felt herself the object of universal contempt. She was a year older than the eldest pupil; and while that happy eldest pupil was crowning the triumphs of a prolonged scholastic career by private lessons in Latin, chemistry, and Italian singing, exalted even above that senior class in which she had long distinguished herself, poor Loo had been placed in the nethermost rank of little ones, where she sat at the lowest end of a stumpy form, feeling herself a huge grotesque figure, among small children who openly laughed at her ignorance.

Gazing at the cold cleanliness, the rigid order of that spacious dormitory, Loo's thoughts reverted to the back-parlour in Voysey-street, and that scene of homely muddle upon which her eyes had been wont to open. The battered ancient furniture crowded in that narrow space, the table still scattered with the utensils of last night's supper, the saucepans in the fender, Jarred's pipes and tobacco-jar on the mantel-piece, the dingy old pictures on the walls, the stained and worn old crimson-cloth curtain that kept out the north wind, the big arm-chair in which she was wont to sit after supper—now filled with a kind of effigy of Mrs. Gurner, composed of that lady's empty garments, which from long use had assumed the shape of the wearer—the sleeping grandmother's wrinkled face and frilled nightcap of doubtful purity: Loo thought of these things with a regretful sigh.

She had hated Voysey-street with all her heart; but this bleak unfriendly outer world seemed harder than Voysey-street. There, at least, she had been like

the rest of the inhabitants; here she felt herself a Pariah. She would rather have had to get up and clean that dingy back-parlour, blacklead the grate, lay and light the fire, fill the kettle, run out for rolls and Yarmouth bloaters, squabble with the milkman, go through all the familiar daily round of sordid household toil, than rise presently to meet the blank gaze of those unfamiliar faces, to sit at the long breakfast-table fed and provided for, but unnoticed and unloved.

Miss Tompion's young ladies looked at her with the eye of suspicion; she knew and felt that it was so. They had asked her certain regulation questions as to her belongings and past career; to which she had replied with resolute reserve. Was she an orphan and a ward in Chancery? No. Had she a father and mother? No; only a father. What was his profession? An artist. What kind of artist? A picture-restorer.

The girls looked at one another doubtfully, and Miss Portslade, the young lady who was finishing her education with Latin and chemistry, and who had taken the inquiry upon herself, elevated her eyebrows, as much as to say this was very low indeed.

"A picture-restorer!" she repeated. "Isn't that the same as a picture-cleaner?"

"I believe so."

"Then I'd say 'cleaner' in future if I were you, Miss Gurner. It doesn't sound consistent for a young lady in the lower fourth to use fine words. And, pray, where does your papa, the picture-cleaner, reside?" looking at the others as much as to say, "Observe the humour of the situation."

"In Voysey-street," answered Loo sulkily.

"Is that anywhere near Eccleston-square?" asked Miss Marchfield, the belle of the school, who lived in that locality.

"I don't know."

"O, come, you must know if Voysey-street is in Belgravia."

"I don't know Belgravia."

"What, not after living all your life in London?"

"I hardly know anything of London except the street I lived in," returned Loo, flaming out upon them with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks. "I have come to school because I am ignorant—that's why I sit on the form with the little ones, that's why I am here. My father is not a gentleman, and Voysey-street is not a street that ladies and gentlemen live in. The Voysey-street people are common and ignorant and poor. I have come here to learn to be a lady, if I can—though if I'm only to be taught by example, I don't think there's much chance for me."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Portslade, colouring, while some of the other girls tittered slightly, not sorry to see "Portslade" get the worst of it. "We are learning to be satirical—I suppose that's the first effect of education!"

Loo went back to her exercise-book, and laboured earnestly at the rudiments of the French tongue; and the young ladies, opining that they had obtained the utmost information to be extracted from her, asked her no farther questions. There seemed nothing interesting in her circumstances. Had they known that she was an exile from her father's roof, and that a handsome young man was to pay for her education,

they would not have let her off so lightly. Those romantic circumstances might even have elevated her above their contempt; but Loo kept religious silence upon the subject.

Miss Tompion had been requested to purchase an outfit for her pupil, and had received no limit as to expense. But being a person who prided herself upon her conscientiousness and uprightness—virtues which she brought to the front on all occasions, and pushed to the border of severity—Miss Tompion was careful to purchase such garments as were suitable to Louisa's somewhat indefinite position, and to her future humble career as a bread-winner. Gowns of plainest material and Quaker-like hue did Miss Tompion procure for her pupil—no silks, no trimmings, none of the small unnecessary graces of the toilet. When Loo came down dressed for church in her claret-coloured silk on the first Sunday, Miss Tompion narrowly escaped a fainting-fit.

"Never again let me behold you in that dreadful dress, Miss Gurner," exclaimed the instructor of youth, when she had recovered the normal tranquillity of her spirits; "a dress eminently inappropriate to your position, and most repugnant to my taste. Believe me, that your first appearance in this house in that dress would have been sufficient to secure your exclusion, had the references afforded me been less satisfactory than they were. Fold it neatly and place it in the bottom of your trunk, if you please, Miss Gurner, and come back to me in that nice gray alpaca which I selected for you."

Loo went up to the wardrobe room—a bleak repository of boxes and best raiment—and put away the

obnoxious gown, but not until she had showered the rich red silk with scalding tears of shame and anger—not until she had kissed the garment with her hot dry lips.

"He gave it to me," she gasped, "and I love it for his sake—and I hate the ugly nasty things she buys me. Just as if I was some poor creature who had gone wrong, and was here to be reformed. I feel myself marked out from all the rest even by my clothes—as if that were needed to make a difference, when they are so unlike me in all things belonging to them. Their fathers and mothers, and uncles and aunts, and cousins and friends—people coming to see them—people sending them parcels—people writing them letters; while I stand alone—and have no one—not even poor old grandmother. It would do me good to hear her nagging—after Miss Tompion."

The beginning of education seemed the weariest work to Louisa Gurner. She had only little bits to learn—little bits of geography and arithmetic, English grammar and French grammar—and a bald twaddling English history to read with her small companions. The spoon-meat suitable to babes of eight and nine years was deemed suitable to her because she too was a beginner. In all the educational process there was nothing she could grasp at. Bald facts about the Heptarchy and William the Conqueror—an infantile history of Rome from the babyhood and youthful squabbles of Romulus and Remus to the age of the Cæsars—what was there in these to charm Loo, who had read English and classic history in Shakespeare's living page—who had breathed Egypt's warm airs with Antony and Cleopatra, and followed mighty

Queen Margaret from the day of her youthful pride to the hour of ruin, bereavement, and exile? Wearied out by the inanity of her daily labours—labours which she executed with honest earnest care, for his sake who had placed her in this seminary—Loo ventured to ask Miss Tompion for some books to read in the evening.

"With pleasure, my dear Miss Gurner," replied the schoolmistress graciously, "if you have conscientiously completed your studies and prepared yourself for to-morrow."

"I've learned all my lessons, and finished my exercises, and I think I could do a good deal more, if you please, Miss Tompion, if I were allowed. I feel so out of place among those little girls—so big and awkward on that low form—and they laugh at me. I'm sure I could learn three times as much—I don't feel as if I was getting on a bit."

"I am sorry to observe the indications of a discontented spirit, Miss Gurner," said Miss Tompion with severity. "It was my wish that you should be placed in the lower fourth, that you should ascend by easy gradations, and not overtax your capacity at the outset. Remember that in almost all things you are as ignorant as those small children at whose childish mirth you complain. It is my desire that you should be thoroughly grounded, Miss Gurner—that you should begin at the beginning—and not acquire a mere surface varnish of education, which would wear off as quickly as it was attained."

Loo blushed at that allusion to varnish, thinking of her father's pictures.

"If you feel yourself out of place on the form,

you may have a cane chair at the end of the bench," said Miss Tompion. "I am willing to make that concession to your feelings."

"Thank you, ma'am. I shall feel less ridiculous in a chair."

"And now what kind of book would you like?" asked Miss Tompion, glancing at some well-filled shelves of neatly-bound volumes immediately behind her chair, volumes which the pupils were permitted to borrow.

"Poetry, if you please, ma'am. Might I have a volume of Shakespeare?"

"Shakespeare!" exclaimed Miss Tompion, horrified. "Do you suppose that is a book I would place in the hands of any pupil in this establishment? Shakespeare! You horrify me, Miss Gurner. I believe there is an expurgated edition intended for the domestic circle, published by the estimable firm of Chambers; but until they can expurgate the subjects of many of the plays, no edition of Shakespeare shall ever enter any domestic circle where I keep watch and ward. I will select a book for you, Miss Gurner."

Whereupon Miss Tompion handed the abashed Loo a dryasdust volume of missionary travels in the South Sea Islands, with repellent portraits of copper-coloured converts, and prosy descriptions of the bread-fruit tree. Poor Loo yawned drearily over the South Sea islanders, and could not interest herself in the question of their ultimate conversion. She remembered how many heathens there were around and about Voysey-street—heathens who heard church-bells pealing Sunday after Sunday, and yet stayed at home to smoke and drink and idle, and perhaps wind

up the day with a wife-beating. Loo remembered the general condition of Voysey-street, and wondered that people should go so far afield for converts.

Every day made the school routine more irksome to her. The gates of knowledge were opened such a little way; she felt she had learned a great deal more from Walter Leyburne's books, in those stolen night-watches while her grandmother was asleep, than she could ever learn from Miss Storks, the instructress of the little ones, whose homœopathic doses of information only wearied her. A few dry dates; a little bit of general information about the castor-oil tree, and the process which converts hops into beer, or barley into malt. Hard uninteresting facts were administered to her like powders. If Miss Storks had given her Schiller and a German dictionary, the eager desire to know a new poet might have overcome all difficulties; nay, difficulties would have inspired this vigorous nature. But the easy twaddle of the lower fourth disgusted her with the whole business of education. Her ardent longing for enlightenment would have given a zest to toil. She would have laboured early and late, had she felt herself gaining ground, climbing upward to that mountain land tenanted by the spirits of the wise and great; but instead of studies that would call upon her industry and develop the latent power of her mind, Miss Storks gave her infantine lessons, which she repeated parrotwise, in common with girls in pinafores and plaited hair.

"I should have to be here ten years before I knew as much as Miss Portslade," she thought despairingly; "and she seems a mass of ignorance, compared with Walter Leyburne."



She, the Pariah, had ventured to question that exalted Brahmin, the most exalted girl in the school. She had talked to Miss Portslade of poets and painters, and had been surprised by the narrow views of the damsel, whose acquaintance with the world of imagination had never gone beyond the choice morsels in a gift-book or selection for recitation, and who knew about as much of art as the great gray cockatoo on the brazen stand in the ballroom—a big bare apartment opening on the garden, where Miss Tompion's pupils took their dancing lessons.

It was a hard thing to sit in that peopled classroom, and feel herself friendless—to see the girls with arms round one another's waists in confidential talk—to know that all had their favourite companions, their friendships, their secrets, their various bonds of union, and to know herself outside all. After that cross-examination by Miss Portslade, her fate was sealed—the fiat had gone forth—she was a vulgar common person, whom it was not the correct thing to know. Her very presence in the school was an offence against those high-bred young ladies. Miss Portslade's father was a half-pay colonel at Bath; whereby she looked down upon the Miss Collinsons and the Miss Pycrofts, whose parents were coach-builders and Italian-warehouse people; and only tolerated Miss Badgeman, whose father brewed. Miss Portslade had remarked that the line must be drawn somewhere. At no superior school in Bath would an Italian-warehouseman's daughter be admitted. Miss Portslade had shut her eyes to the degradation of Italian warehouses; but now a picture-cleaner's daughter was foisted upon them, Miss Portslade felt that the

line must be drawn; and the line, being drawn, severed Louisa Gurner from the young persons among whom she lived. The barest civility was shown her; she was as lonely as a leper in an Eastern city; nay, more alone, for she had not even fellow-lepers with whom to keep company. Some soft-hearted damsels among Miss Tompion's pupils looked at the Pariah with eyes of pity, as she sat isolated at the darkest end of the schoolroom conning her brief lessons. These yearned to show her some kindness—to speak a few cheering words—yearned, but dared not: the fear of Miss Portslade was before their eyes. There is nothing more slavish than a schoolgirl; and Miss Portslade's sarcasm was considered crushing.

It had been decided at an early stage of Louisa's initiation that she was not only vulgar, but ugly. Those large dark eyes were not proper—too large, too dark, too brilliant when she was angry. The long black lashes were tolerable enough, or would have been passable in a better-born young person. The dark-pale complexion was simply abominable.

"I wonder if she ever washes," mused Miss Portslade.

"I should think she must be a Jewess, with those eyes," remarked Miss Badgeman.

"Or perhaps her mother was a gipsy, and sold brooms," speculated Miss Collinson.

"A good idea, Collinson. It's like you to put a spoke in her wheel," retorted Miss Portslade, with happy allusion to the coach-building business, where—at Miss Collinson blushed.

The general opinion about her ugliness found its way somehow to Loo's ears. The little ones—either

egged-on by some malicious elder or spontaneously spiteful—communicated the edict of that *Vehmgericht* in which Miss Portslade was chief magistrate. They told Loo what had been said of her complexion and of her eyes.

“Did your mother really sell brooms?” asked Miss Flopson, the lowest in the lower fourth.

“No, she didn’t,” answered Loo; “but I’d ever so much rather sell brooms than stay here. You can tell your fine young ladies that.”

The speech was duly reported in Miss Flopson’s shrill treble.

“Of course,” said Miss Portslade, pausing in an Italian theme, in which she was descanting on the merits of Petrarch and Tasso in her fine Italian hand, “anybody could see that she has those low instincts. She is out of place here, and I’m glad she feels it.”

Louisa wondered whether that was a true bill which charged her with ugliness. It was not the first time she had been reproached for lack of beauty. Her father, when in a good humour, had praised her for her good looks—told her she had as fine a pair of eyes as you could meet in a day’s walk, and that there’d be money bid for her yet, if she took care of herself. But when out of sorts—when the feathers of this bird of prey had been unpleasantly ruffled—Mr. Gurner had been wont to upbraid his only child—to call her black as Erebus, and ugly as a toad. Her grandmother had been wont to wail and lament because Loo favoured the Gurners rather than the old lady’s own people, who were all fair, with aquiline noses and auburn hair, and appeared to have been a

race alike distinguished for dignity and good looks. What of Walter? Had he thought her handsome?

He had hardly told her so; and though he had made her the model for two of his pictures, it was possible that beauty was not the characteristic of either heroine she had been required to represent. Lamia, the serpent-woman, must be at best a semi-diabolical personage. Esmeralda, the gipsy-girl, crouching on the prison floor, could have been but a wild unkempt creature. He had seldom praised her beauty in all their free happy talk. But he had done something better during that night journey from Kingston. He had told her that he loved her; with passion, with insistence had repeated the confession of his love; told her how he loved her in spite of himself; loved her all the while he had been striving his hardest to love some one else; and that he would marry her and none other, if she would have him.

She had been brave enough to reject him; to say no; not once, but many times; not in the Kingston road only, but afterwards on the day he had brought her to Thurlow House. She had held his future happiness, his prospects, above her own content, and had said him nay, very proud that he had loved her well enough to contemplate such a sacrifice.

Thus, remembering that he had loved her, that decision of the schoolgirls about her ugliness troubled her very little. It was enough to know that she was good enough to be loved by him, fair enough to please the painter's eye, sweet enough to have crept unawares into his heart. Let the rest of the world condemn her as ugly and vulgar. She had won the only praise she cared for.

How she thought of him and dreamed of him in her new loneliness amidst an unfriendly crowd! There were certain intervals in which she was free to walk in the garden—the old secluded garden, with its high red-brick walls, and ancient turf, soft and deep, and century-old espaliers. The house was to be pulled down shortly to make room for a railway station; but in the mean time it was a fine old mansion—a relic of an old world. The schoolgirls could hear the hum of Kensington High-street from that shady old garden, but they could see no more of the outer world than the roofs and chimneys that rose above the wall.

Loo walked alone, and thought of the old pleasant easy-going days in Voysey-street—Voysey-street which she had hated so intensely while she inhabited it, but which she looked back upon now with a tender fondness. How happy she had been there, after all! What Bohemian ease and freedom of life! No sneers, no cold looks; nothing to endure but a little harmless nagging from Mrs. Gurner, monotonous as the dropping of water, and no more injurious; or an occasional outbreak of temper from Jarred. That had been bad, certainly; but he was her father, and she had pitied him and loved him, and blamed the hardness of Fate and the world for all his shortcomings. She had believed what he told her so often—that he would have been a better man if Fortune had used him better.

Here there were no angry looks, no lightning glances that made her quail; no gradual change to good humour and friendliness, generally culminating

in a hot supper and a jovial evening; for Jarred was at his best when he shook himself out of an evil temper, and comforted himself with a gill of rum from the public-house, and cried *Vogue la galère!* Here there were only cold indifferent faces, eyes which seemed to overlook her.

The garden was the best place, for there she could get away from the superior young ladies who had agreed to ignore her. There she could find a shady path, where she could walk up and down, and think of the days that were no more. Hard for the very young when they have to look back and say, "Yes; *that* was life."

Loo had been at Thurlow House nearly a month, and Walter Leyburne had made no sign of his remembrance of her. At parting, when she clung to him, weeping passionately, forgetful of all good resolutions—very woman in her sorrow and weakness—he had comforted her with promises of letters and visits. Miss Tompion had allowed them a few minutes—not more than five—of farewell, undisturbed by her presence.

"I'll come to see you, Loo, as soon as I think you've settled down a little, and I'll write every week."

"No, you won't; you'll go and marry Miss Chamney, and forget that there's such a person as I on the face of the earth."

"Forget you, Loo! I wish I could. Haven't you told me to forget you?"

"Yes—and it would be best for both of us. But don't do it all at once. I had rather you didn't come to see me; only write—do write, Walter!" speaking

his Christian name in that low thrilling tone which comes from the depth of a woman's heart—rare had been her utterance of that dear name. "You will write, won't you, and tell me what you are painting, and if you are happy—and—when you are going to be married?"

"I wish you wouldn't harp upon that string, Loo. You've refused to marry me—so you may as well leave the subject alone."

"I want you to be happy," she said sorrowfully, tenderly, looking into his face with her solemn eyes, as if she were trying to read the mystery of his thoughts. "Hark! Miss What's-her-name is coming. You *will* write?"

"Yes, Loo; once a week at the least."

Once a week, and no letter had come in four long weeks. Poor unstable Walter had tried to write from Branscomb and had failed. It was too hard a task to write to Loo, when to tell her of his daily life was to speak of Flora. He felt that there would be a kind of treachery towards both in writing that promised letter—so he made up his mind to wait till he got back to London, when he would go and see poor Loo, and find out how she got on in her new phase of existence.

"It wouldn't do to visit her often, of course," he said to himself; "but just once, to see if she is happy; nobody could object to that."

Then came that summer afternoon in the garden with "Epipsychidion," and Flora's gentle joy when he offered her that weak heart of his. After that he could not think of Loo without a pang—and yet did

think of her to his own torture—recalling her tears, her agonised look at parting.

“Poor child, she did not know it was for ever,” he thought. “Yet she would not have me when I offered myself to her. I have no reason to be sorry for her. Perhaps it is for myself I am sorry.”

At parting, Walter squeezed a crumpled envelope into Louisa’s hand, just at the last moment of all, while Miss Tompion’s eye was upon them. The girl forgot all about this paper in the pain of parting. She went straight up to the long white bleak bed-chamber which had been shown her—to the spotless little bed she was to sleep on, indicated by a neat cardboard tablet on the wall above, on which her name was written. Beside this narrow couch Loo flung herself, and buried her tearful face in the coverlet, and wept as long as her tears would flow—wept till the loud clang of the tea-bell pealed shrilly through the house, when the forlorn damsel rose, washed her face, and smoothed her tangled hair, but could not obliterate the traces of those foolish tears. Her eyelids were puffy and red; her cheeks white as a sheet of letter-paper. She looked a wretched creature to appear before fifty pairs of strange eyes.

Just as she was leaving the room, she spied that crumpled paper on the floor by her bed, and ran eagerly to pick it up. He had given it to her. It might contain some word of comfort.

Alas, no. Outside the envelope was written, “For pocket-money.” Inside there was nothing but a twenty-pound bank-note.

She looked at the money as if it were the most



despicable thing in the world—she who had never had a twenty-pound note in her hand before.

“How good of him!” she thought; “but I don’t want his money. I’d rather have had a few lines of comfort.”

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